

Her
Own Devices



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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Her Own Devices

✓
Pioneer Series

Her Own Devices

By
✓
C. G. Compton



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CHAPTER I

THE young woman who swung into the glowing heat of the Circus Road, on a day of a recent July, met three persons.

The gentleman who had lost his way while looking for a house thought that she was a fine girl, spoilt by red hair; the lady, calling in St. John's Wood, remembered the reputation of the district, but noticing a brick-red bow on a blue skirt, condemned herself as uncharitable; the young man from Mills & Parker, general drapers, hesitated between nodding, and bowing to a bargain customer. Miss Susan Stanier foresaw his hesitation, and passed him rather too unconsciously.

Susan's air, dress, gait, looks, and figure were challenging. A tall figure, set off by a brown jacket, with waistcoat bodice of blue check on buff, a brown skirt, and a sailor's

hat and a veil to keep off the sun, which had splashed the pink of her complexion as if it had been dredged with bran. She walked quickly, though with a slight drag in her stride, nursed her parasol after the fashion of a past day, and kept on the shady side, so that she would not have to put up the parasol. As she passed across the gaps in the shade thrown by garden limes, the sombre red of her hair glowed like fused metal, and the next moment sank into massive sumptuous shadows.

It had been said that she had the air of having refused diamonds. The phrase had pleased her, till she asked herself whether the merit of the refusal outweighed having provoked the offer. She hated the phraser, and maintained her expression.

At the point where the fare to Charing Cross is lowest she took the omnibus, riding outside to see the shops and people generally and passing friends. A lady outside a returning omnibus waved a limp brown-paper-covered booklet at Susan, who smiled congratulations.

"So she's got the part. A long tour just after a good London engagement," thought

Susan. At Piccadilly she took a scrap of paper out of her glove, and read her own notes of the day's plans. The first one was "theatre," vague to give no information to the casual finder she was haunted by, and precise enough to arouse an uncertain memory. She waited at the theatre for an hour and a quarter, three-quarters of an hour at the stage-door, half an hour in front. Then she was told that the manager would be back in about an hour or so. She left word that she would return, and then set off to lunch at an Italian café, a few doors off, where, perhaps, she might meet some professional friends released from rehearsal. No one was there except the eternal domino-players. Giuseppe Joe, the Anglo-Italian waiter, received her gracefully, regretting that she had just missed the dark lady who came last time, and Mr. Falconer, and Mr. Porter. Mr. Porter was very funny; he had broken another wine-glass trying the same trick as the other day. The macaroni was ready, but he advised the cutlets and a salad. Susan had the macaroni, because it cost less, and she was by herself, and could save without being noticed. But it was deadly dull in this stale café with no one to

talk to, and only the click of the dominoes on the marble slab to break the silence. It was sickening work running about after engagements and not getting them, and not even seeing a soul to hear what was going on. This was July, nearly the end, and since October she had been at work seven weeks, including rehearsals. She was quite as pretty or handsome, which ever you like, as half-a-dozen girls who were always in engagement. Every one said so; and as for the acting, she knew she was quite as good. A bit rusty perhaps, but that would wear off in a night or two. Only about two years ago she had been at one theatre for more than eighteen months, and played ingénues in two successes; and met jolly people, and saved money as well. That was a good time. She had come to consider it as the highest point of her career, and the best time she had yet scored. Everything was right then. One of papa's companies had succeeded, and he had given her pocket-money and good advice about saving, which, from a company promoter, was valuable. And actually they had given a party at 'The Retreat,' not a grand affair, but something that could be called an At

Home, was printed on cards, and mentioned in *Smart People*.

And besides, there were other things, things she would never forget; but she did n't want to think about them. It did no good. It was past and done with and forgotten or, better still, not known; all the same, it had been vivid and, and — it was difficult to find the right word — and delicious and dangerous.

She looked again at the scrap of paper. Hair-pins — cleaner's (three pairs) — and so on, and B. L. Clearly some one's initials, ingeniously reversed. Lucien Bewick, of course. Susan meant to have called on him earlier, and if she did not go at once, he would have left his office. After all it was business, too, and she would be at the theatre in time if she was quick and took a 'bus each way. In a few minutes she was standing in a street connecting the Strand to the Embankment, and was watching a window on the first floor of the house opposite.

The street had been suddenly brought into publicity by one of the improvements which have made London look like a hospital for mutilated thoroughfares. The upper part

had long ignored a Strand degenerate from early Victorian decorum, the lower part protested like Modesty Outraged. If the feelings had their expression, so had the intellect. Speaking for the street it said plainly, if you knew the language, "We know our position is illogical; we know that we are absurd, unrelated, and out of harmony with those vulgar foreign hotels, and those barracks they call mansions. It is not our fault. You let the daylight in on us. You are this sort of people who would wake the Sleeping Beauty with an electric current and an arc lamp. That seems funny to you. We think it rude, but we are helpless. Let our leases fall in!"

Miss Stanier expressed the same idea by saying that York Place was hung up. She had been there before; she knew the spot that gave a view into the room on the first floor where, through the worn dulling of the further window, Lucien Bewick could be seen at his desk. He was the junior working partner of Philipson, Thorn & Barlow, architects and surveyors, whose name in thin white letters on a black ground appeared on the pillars of the doorway.

Mr. Bewick was not in view. Perhaps he had gone; it was late for him to be at the office on a Saturday. There was no hat on the rail behind the desk, still that was not conclusive. She walked to the Embankment, came back, looked in, and saw a gentleman standing at the desk. She crossed at once before he could see her, entered, and ran up the stairs, and breathlessly asked the articted pupil, who had been kept hours after his right time, and had lost his train and his temper, whether Mr. Bewick had gone.

"He's here," said the young man as it occurred to him that he had seen this lady before, and that she, and not pressure, was the reason he had been kept so late. Men had done such things. He had lost the match of the season, and he felt like bowling to-day.

"Will you give him my card, if you please?" said Miss Stanier, who was fond of leaving cards with her name rather larger than is usual. They get seen, and seeing is talking, and talking is advertisement.

The gentleman took the card into the other room; in a few minutes he returned with a

much improved manner, as cheerful as Ariel after liberation.

"Let me give you a chair, Miss Stanier. Mr. Bewick will see you at once. I'll just take him these papers first," he said, reversing his instructions. He blew down a tube, blew up the man at the other end for not answering quicker than sound travels, and ordered a fast hansom, "not the donkey bath-chair sort you got me last time; and fetch my bag, Perkins, and hurry up for the Lord's sake!" Then he opened drawers swiftly, took out plans and drawings, shut and locked desk and drawers.

"Excuse me. Important appointment," he said, flying into the next room. "I thought I'd bring these in first, in case you had anything to ask about them," he said, putting the papers on the desk.

"Thank you, Stapleton, I know all I want to. Ask the lady in now. You've scarcely time to catch your train. Good-bye. Hope you'll win."

To load Perkins with a big cricket-bag, show Miss Stanier in, and lock up the office, was for Stapleton the work of seconds. In sight of the clock tower showing two minutes

to spare, he blessed Bewick for letting him off, and determined to make his married sister, Annie, send Mrs. Bewick a heap of roses. Mrs. Bewick was awfully fond of flowers, and the nicest woman he knew; and her complexion was just like that new rose Annie's husband thought such a lot of, cool, shelly pink. Perhaps that was the reason they called her Rose. A South-Western van blocking the road interrupted his reflections and threw him into a fever of apprehension, but in the end he saved the train, and helped to beat a team with two county men in it.

"Have I interrupted you, Mr. Bewick?" said Susan, after shaking hands. "Ought n't I to have come? What a blaze of light! I must put my umbrella up. I can't stand this."

"Put it up by all means," said Mr. Bewick.

So she sat with her dull red sunshade between her and the window.

"We're being done up, you see. No curtains, no carpets, and so on. We go to Westport on Monday, I'm glad to say."

"You look as if you wanted a rest," said Susan, who had been watching Lucien's delicate features, and had noticed his har-

assed expression. "You work too hard. Why does n't the other partner do something?"

"Mr Philipson's eighty, and past work."

"Not past interfering. Why does n't he let you run the whole thing?" said Susan.

"It's his business, you see. Mr. Lloyd and I are juniors only," replied Lucien, smiling. "And old people like to keep power; it's only natural."

"You're too charitable or too philosophical, Mr. Bewick. You'll overwork yourself at last, and fade away all of a sudden. If I was a man I would —"

"You would act as a man, not as a woman," said Bewick simply.

He had an air, trick, or manner of detachment which annoyed and attracted Susan.

"Am I wasting your time?" she asked. "Ought n't you to be helping Mrs. Bewick to pack?"

"Mrs. Bewick is n't packing. Horace Shepherd and Elgin Welford have taken her to see that new Frenchman's pictures, and afterwards to musical tea in Bond Street."

"Tea and music both bad, total result rather jolly," replied Susan. "Mr. Shepherd

is a great friend of Mrs. Bewick's, isn't he?"

"He's an old friend of mine," said Bewick; "and says he only forgave me for marrying because it was Rose."

"Pretty of him, but not a new reason for not marrying himself. Who is Mr. Welford?"

"A nice youth Rose met at a dance last year. They are great friends now," said patient Mr. Bewick.

"Mr. Bewick, do you like walking-sticks?" asked Susan.

"Yes, I do; but I'm rather fastidious about them; so if you're going to provide me with one, you'd better let me choose it myself," said Lucien. Susan looked at him inquiringly, and smiled slowly. If the lines of her mouth had been rendered geometrically, the upper lip would have formed the apex and two sides of an irregular triangle. Consequently, the mouth was rarely quite closed, and now, as she smiled reflectively, it seemed the most important feature of the face.

"Now I must go to the theatre," declared Susan abruptly, though she had carefully thought the matter over. "Cheniston's sure

not to be there; but he might, you know, and I don't want to miss a chance, even if it's only a summer season and summer prices. May I come back? You won't be gone in half-an-hour, will you?"

"I must be here some time yet," said Lucien. "See," and he held up a lot of papers and plans, "I pay for my holiday in advance."

"May I leave my cloak here," asked Susan, closing her sunshade, and rising. She stood in profile to him, but it only revived his old impression that her profile was fairly good, nothing out of the way. The curve of the nose was either too much or too little.

"Of course you may," he said, taking the cloak from her, and hanging it over two pegs. "The loop's broken," he explained.

"Just as I started," said Susan, vexed.

Her heels clattered on the bare floor as she walked to the door followed by Lucien. The mid-summer sun blazed into the naked room. Against the wall leant carpets in rolls; at the end of the passage was a stack of planks and ladders.

At the theatre Susan was told that the

manager would write to her. She knew what that meant. It did not bother her. She was too busy thinking about Lucien Bewick. Ryan Legard, the light comedian, had introduced them about two years ago. Lucien had attracted her by not trying to. She had sung in a cantata of his, and had been at every practice. It was a nuisance having to be so particular about time and pitch, still it had brought them together, and enabled her to cultivate a friendship with Mrs. Bewick, which would be useful later. They knew a great many people of a good sort. Yet she and Lucien were scarcely more than ordinary acquaintances. They got on very well together, though he didn't seem to care whether he saw her once a week or once a month. At first she suspected that he did this on purpose, now she was convinced that it was genuine. That was just like him. His simplicity made the real thing as effectual as the cleverest imitation.

She liked to analyse her friends, to catalogue their personal qualities, to make an inventory of their distinctive peculiarities. She had done this with Lucien a long time ago, but to-day she felt more than ever inter-

ested in him. She knew he must be thirty-five, that he had been married five years, and was a satisfactory husband. He was good-looking enough, though no maiden's dream of romantic lover. He was fair and tall and biggish, of a gracious amplitude, not suggesting fairs and phenomena. Susan liked her men friends large. She liked them also to do all the usual athletic things. In this, too, Lucien, who had boated, and cricketed, and played the Rugby game at Oxford, satisfied demands which Susan thought original. So reviving his image, recalling his quiet tones, considerate manner, and irritating seriousness, she walked slowly along the Embankment towards his office.

As a matter of fact, Lucien Bewick was Susan Stanier's first experience of a class she had always looked up to, and though she would not own it, had always envied, and had resolved to know and to belong to.

She went up York Place on the side opposite to Philipson, and watched Lucien, as she had often watched him before. When he leant over the desk, only his fair head could be seen; when he leant back reading some paper, she had a profile view of a short

whisker and a thick moustache. He went on working as if there was no Susan Stanier in the world, and no Susan Stanier's cloak behind him. His persistence in dull work was of a piece with the orderly home life; the patient waiting for what could not be hurried, which contrasted haughtily with Susan's life of hurry and uncertainty and petty excitement.

Rose Bewick was awfully lucky, with a lovely flat and lots of friends, and a husband like Lucien, who liked her to enjoy herself in her own way, and only chaffed her about her men friends.

She, Susan, did not, and never would, believe that Rose was so popular only because she was frank and sweet and sincere. If she had, and kept, such a lot of men friends, she must do it by flirting. It was the only way; every one knew that except Lucien, who slaved all day and composed music in the evening.

At this point Susan found that she had attracted undesired attention. It was her rule never to get observed. Caution was a first and a second nature with her.

Directly she noticed the servants looking

out of the top window of the private hotel, she took her own card out of her purse, read it carefully, looked at the numbers of the houses near her, and then crossed and went quickly into Lucien's office, which she knew could not be seen from the hotel. "At last!" she exclaimed gaily. "Tired of waiting, Mr. Bewick?"

Lucien looked at her, with his mind full of figures and dimensions.

"Oh, Miss Stanier! I have not been waiting for any one; I've been working well and quickly, as I always do when the place is quiet. Didn't you leave something here—a cloak, wasn't it? Here it is." He handled the cloak as one who has a wife. "Isn't it hot?" said Susan, holding the cloak as if it was a duster. "The hottest day we've had."

"July is hot, you know," replied Mr. Bewick; "but to-day's only seventy-eight or seventy-nine in the shade. It's been more than that several days," he continued, looking at the thermometer on his desk.

"The wind's so burning," said Susan.

"It's due north to-day," replied Bewick.

"Mr. Bewick, I would like to sit down."

"Really, I beg your pardon, I thought you were going."

"Shall I be in your way?"

"Not a bit. I can go on working just the same. You won't crackle papers?"

"I have n't any."

"Here's a book, that's quieter, *La Chartreuse de Parme*. You read French?"

Susan nodded as to a superfluous question. She read the first paragraph to herself, and wondered what on earth it meant. Something about Buonaparte and Milan and Lodi. Who or what was Lodi, and, for the matter of that, who was Stendhal or Beyle? She had never heard of him. Bewick was writing at a great pace. This was n't Susan's programme at all.

"Mr. Bewick, I should like some tea," she said prettily.

Bewick looked at his watch, and went into the other room and rang a bell.

"You don't mind waiting five minutes?" he said, resuming his writing.

"Not at all," replied Susan, but he did not hear. He was absorbed, and Susan's poor voice was not of the sort to divert a busy man. Her voice annoyed her. It

did n't suit her appearance in any respect. It should have been sweet or rich, instead of either toneless or shrill. She watched Bewick working strenuously, impassively. She rather hoped he would make faces and talk to himself, but he worked on with the calm of a seraph. So she studied his features, the way he did his hair, which she wanted to smooth, and the form of his neck-tie.

"The five minutes is gone," said Susan.

"And the housekeeper," said Bewick. "If she does n't come in five minutes, she's gone out. No tea, I'm sorry to say."

This, also, was not Susan's programme.

"We could get some tea outside at Bridge's, you know," she said.

"Do you want it very much?" he exclaimed. "What an idiot I am! You don't mind waiting, do you? I sha'n't be long."

On he went again, putting the work first. In a few minutes he had finished, and locked up his desk, after putting a long envelope full of papers into his pocket, so that it bulged out.

"That won't do," said Susan. "It looks

awful. Put it in the tail-pocket. Is that my doing? Will you have to finish that while you're at Westport?" she asked as they went out.

"I am afraid I shall unless I do it to-morrow."

"Mrs. Bewick hates you to work on Sunday, doesn't she?" continued Susan, delighted. "She told me so. Don't blame it on me, will you?"

"There will be no blaming," said Bewick. "I sha'n't say more than the truth."

"Never obtrude the truth unnecessarily," replied Susan. "That's a wise saying, isn't it? said by a wise man, too."

"Who was he, Miss Stanier?"

"A Spaniard, with a lovely sounding name — Balthasar Gracian," said Susan, making a shot. She had skimmed a notice of a magazine article on maxim writers.

"Then," said Bewick, "Balthasar Gracian was a liar."

"All the same to oblige me, don't say it was my fault," she urged, much amused.

"I won't say anything about it, that's the simplest way. Where's your tea-shop, Miss Stanier?"

"Just near Regent Street. Don't let's go to Bridge's; it's dully respectable. The Polish café's the place this season."

"What news about your opera, Mr. Bewick," Susan asked, as they sat at a table in the Polish café. "Are you going to give me an engagement?" She was pouring out the tea to show off hands as white as toilet cream could make them. They fluttered about the table incessantly, now poising insect-like over the sugar, then with fingers bent and separated hovering about the strawberries, next drooping over the arm of the chair. The motive was eternal, the style antiquated, recalling the graces of a Book of Beauty.

"Mrs. Baumann has n't got a theatre yet," said Bewick. "I don't think she ever will, and I'm not sorry for what I've seen of their way of treating music."

"If you're going to have anything to do with the stage, you must n't be sensitive, Mr. Bewick," said Susan. "Don't give up! I was so glad when I heard they had accepted your opera. They've engaged people already. Are you going to let me play the virtuous peasant girl?"

"She's a soprano."

"So am I! You mustn't judge by my singing in the cantata. I had a cold all the time; you know I had. Besides, I want an engagement awfully. Isn't it strange, Mr. Bewick, that I should have been out so long after being two years at the St. George's?"

The St. George's theatre always made Miss Stanier sad and pathetic. Playing small parts in farces at a second-rate theatre had been her greatest achievement.

"It was jolly there," she said. "Margaret Coombe and Lena King in one room, Miriam Mallett dressed with me in the next. We had a great time, I can tell you. I was always late home; it was convenient to wait for Miriam and take a Kilburn 'bus, and make the old joke about our ways parting at Hall Road. How many times we've said that. It seems so long ago, so strange that it isn't going on now, or that it ever happened. Where are the rains of yesteryear?"

"Isn't it snows?" asked Bewick.

"Perhaps it is. It's something to do with weather, I know," replied Susan, making a note of snows. "Anyhow, it's all over."

Haseltine's a bankrupt, Miriam's married, and Butler Carstairs is a manager in Australia."

"Butler Carstairs! was he there?"

"Specially engaged for the last piece. Why?"

"Only that we used to hear so much of him," said Bewick. "He was handsome, but not much of an actor, I thought."

"People always say that of handsome men. Butler was a good sort, though," said Susan. "Let's go now, Mr. Bewick; I'm tired of this. Will Rose be back? I'll come on chance. She's discovered a shop where — but that's not for your ears."

At the small flat near Victoria, where the Bewicks lived, they found that Mrs. Bewick had not returned.

"We might have known that," exclaimed Bewick. "They wouldn't have left the Gallery till after five."

"I ought to have thought of that," said Susan. "How stupid."

"Oh, never mind; I'll see you into a 'bus," said Bewick.

"Mayn't I come in, Mr. Bewick, and rest? Please?"

"Of course you may! Forgive my not asking. I didn't think, you know."

They went into the quietly-furnished dining-room.

"Jolly room this," said Susan, taking off her veil; "the sort of room that makes me feel better, morally — I mean. I like it better than the drawing-room, though that's awfully bright. One's Rose, and this other's you."

"Thanks; but they're both Rose. That's me," he said, throwing open the door of a smaller room.

"How neat and orderly, to be sure!" cried Susan. "It makes one shudder. That's where you do your composing. Piano next to desk. How professional!" She laughed at him in mockery. They were standing by the open door very close together. The smile stayed on her face, and he noticed for the first time the seaweed-green of her eyes. He must have examined thoroughly, for she exclaimed suddenly, "What are you thinking of, Mr. Bewick?"

"I beg your pardon. Your eyes reminded me of that movement in the second act." He picked it out on the piano.

Susan's lips lost their sweet bow for a moment. He was too trying. She welcomed Sharpe, the attentive, with tea.

"We've had tea, thanks, Sharpe —"

"And we'll have some more," cut in Susan.

Sharpe smiled sympathetically and handed the tea to Susan, who had taken Bewick's arm-chair.

"It's not good for you two or three times a day," said Bewick, as Sharpe softly left the room.

"Whatever I like is good for me," she replied. "Bread and butter, please, Lucien." She blushed readily. "Mr. Bewick, I mean of course."

He handed the bread and butter.

"You're welcome to the Lucien. It's not the first time, you know."

"Really! Sometimes I don't know what I say. Quick! it will mark my dress."

Some tea had fallen. Lucien applied his handkerchief. A cool, damp hand clasped his.

"I want the handkerchief, Lucien," said Susan, a little late, and released his hand.

She moved to pat the dress with the rolled-

up handkerchief, so that her curved profile and the droop of her neck filled Lucien's eyes.

"Thanks, Lucy. Did they call you Lucy at school?"

"Of course they did."

"Miss Lucy?"

"Not for long."

"Why not?"

"Well, I allowed Lucy, it's so obvious and irresistible; but the other I barred."

"Did you fight for it?"

"Naturally."

"Did you win always?"

"No, of course not, but they weighed the risk."

"Did you like being called by a girl's name?" pursued Susan, stirring her tea, and watching Bewick. The lip bow had come back.

"It didn't last; they gave us another."

"Us?"

"My pal and me; they called us —"

"Fast and Loose," said Susan.

"Yes; Rose told you."

"No, I guessed it. Who was Fast?"

Bewick did not answer for a moment. He

did not care to talk of Willie Raynor at any time, and just now he liked it less than ever.

"I'd rather not talk about it, if you don't mind?" he said.

"I don't mind," said Susan. "But I shall call you Luce."

Bewick said he would call her Susan.

"I don't see why you should have all that footstool," exclaimed Susan.

"There's another by you."

"What's enough for one's enough for two. Besides, I like that best," she persisted, darting out a foot, an ankle, and some stocking. She had turned the stool askew; Bewick replaced it, planting a big foot on it.

"I'll let you have it without fighting for it," he said, wondering.

"Let me have it!" she cried; "I can get it!"

This time she tried with both feet, but Bewick held firmly. She gave up, and he relaxed the pressure. She dashed at the stool suddenly and nearly got it. Bewick was just in time to save it, but caught her foot too.

"You clumsy cruel brute," she cried, "bringing that hoof down on me like that."

It had grazed her shoe, though she looked as if every bone were crushed. Beauty heroic in suffering became her.

"It was clumsy," said Bewick. "There you are." He kicked the stool to her. She returned it, so did he.

"Oh, if you want a game of romps, you can have it," she declared putting her foot on his, and keeping it there till shaken off, while Bewick got more and more puzzled at her behaviour. He was something other than puzzled. She gave him the idea that there was something behind all this, something only partly kept back. He had not seen her look so attractive before, so peculiarly attractive. The seaweed eyes shone like gems; the bright red complexion, bran-patched, glowed under the flaming hair.

It was time she stopped, he thought. As if feeling his wish, Susan declared it was tiring work.

"I am getting hot," she exclaimed. "Look at my hair, what a state it's in."

She went to the glass and put herself to rights.

"My veil, please, Luce," holding out her hand.

He put the veil in her hand, and it slid through the fingers to the ground.

"Luce, you are careless," she said, as he picked it up; and as he rose her hand brushed lightly along his cheek, so lightly, that it sent a thrilling message to his brain. It was a blow in appearance, a caress in effect.

"Tie my veil, Lucien," she said, holding the ends out behind her without moving.

He took the veil and tied it once.

"Not so fast," she cried. Their eyes met in the glass, where they could see themselves talking.

He untied and retied it.

"Not so loose, Luce," she laughed; but when he looked at her reflection, it was very proper.

He untied the veil, and would have begun again, but she took it from him angrily.

"How late it is; I must go. Tell Rose I've been, and wish her a good time at Westport."

She passed out, Lucien following. She could not open the outer door. She was standing so that he had to pass his arm behind her to reach the latch. Even then he had to lean over her. She started aside.

“ What are you doing ? ” she asked sharply.

“ That ’s better,” he said opening the door with his other hand. “ Good-bye, Susan.”

“ Good-bye,” Susan replied, stepping into the street and walking away quickly.

As Lucien looked after her he felt that she was angry with him, and yet he had done nothing.

CHAPTER II

BEWICK had watched Susan till she turned out of Wilmot Gardens. She kept close to the houses, and though she walked fast, it was not with her usual air. She looked limp and shrunken and fugitive. He stared up the road still, though she was long out of sight.

"Is the master in?" asked some one at his side.

"Ryan!" he exclaimed. "Rose will be glad! When did you get back? Come in! How well you're looking!"

"The typical fair bulky Anglo-Saxon met in every class in England from bird-snarer to bishop; sometimes oddly dowered with talent, as in the case of Ryan Legard, who dare n't use his right name, Locke, because the British think an actor is not respectable. That's the voice of the American press. They do hit you off, don't they?" laughed Locke, as they went upstairs.

They smoked and talked of all that had happened since Ryan left, a year ago. Bewick's school friend, Willie Raynor, had died about two years ago. Lucien had gone to Oxford when Willie entered at the Academy schools; and when Lucien brought back his new friend, Ryan Locke, the three young men became close pals. Perhaps Lucien cared a bit more for Willie than for Ryan, and that was not surprising. These two had a common strain of imagination which Ryan did not share, and actually scoffed at and chaffed about. He spoke irreverently of Raynor's successive enthusiasms. He went so far as to say that Whistler was obscure, and for Bewick's chastening, declared that the music of "Queen of My Heart" was in all respects superior to the compositions of Palestrina.

But Ryan had his weakness. Had he not unwearily vaunted the profession of arms? Clearly it was the duty of the others to point out that warfare was an unprogressive science, that the strategy of to-day was essentially that of Alexander and of Cæsar, and that as man got further from the animal, he thought less of fighting.

If the free play of criticism is of any value, those young men must have improved one another. Consequently, when Ryan and Lucien met after a long separation they were sure to talk of Raynor.

"That's the last picture he finished," said Bewick, pointing to a landscape on the opposite wall. "He began it the day we went down to him at that hole in Suffolk. Then he stowed it away for a long time, just as he did with them all."

"Lucien, wasn't he great on personality in art that day? He was very strong on that notion," said Ryan.

"Always very strong, Ryan."

"Technique is nothing — yourself is everything. That was the refrain," continued Ryan. "He could not see what I meant by one's self getting in the way."

"Will you want the pictures he gave you?" asked Bewick. "They're in the other room."

"Keep them till I have a house of my own."

"More chance of it now, I hope?"

"I don't think so, except on the ridiculous condition that we should live with him and have the property when he dies. My dear

Lucien, Sir Thomas has no imagination, or he 'd never ask such a thing."

"Not such a very bad thing after all. Five thousand a year between you, do as you like, and have the wife you want," urged Bewick.

"Why, they have n't been in the county two generations. The first Hoyle was a Bond Street tradesman in William the Fourth's time."

"And the first-known Locke of your family was a goldsmith in George the First's reign," said Bewick.

"That's quite different, quite," said Ryan. "Can't you see the difference? Lucien, you never could see the thing rightly, you never understood."

Lucien's unsentimentality made them drop the subject just as one who did understand came into the room.

It was pretty to see Ryan, pink and laughing, standing over Rose. She welcomed him with both hands, with looks and voice of delighted surprise. As usual, when she was pleased, her colour had spread over her face. This is charming if the colour is cool and the face not too large. It became Rose won-

derfully well. It went with the rare, true brown hair, the dark grey eyes, and the tall light form.

"Ryan, have some dinner with us?" she asked. "You can't be playing to-night."

She touched the electric bell and told Sharpe that Mr. Locke would stay, and wanted an explanation of two tea-cups in a dining-room at this hour.

"Me and a friend," said Bewick.

"Lady-friend, I know," said Rose. "Ryan they're still at it. They run after him terribly. I'm tired of ladies inquiring about 'dear Mr. Bewick,' 'your good husband,' and so on."

"We all suffer that way," said Ryan. "Which was it this time, Luce?"

"Susan Stanier; your introduction, mind?"

"Entertaining actresses while I'm unawares. Lucien, you're getting on," exclaimed Rose.

"Lively girl, Susan," said Ryan, smiling.

It was time to get ready for dinner Rose declared. And afterwards, while Lucien was putting his music-room in order, Ryan and Rose talked in nice full, solid, serious fashion. No skimming over things, no

jumping from one subject to another, but everything and everybody honestly discussed. Ryan liked listening to *Fleur de Luce*, as he had called Rose any time these five years, and when she had a lot to tell him he liked it all the better. Every one knew he spoilt her, and some said it was ridiculous, and others said it was scandalous; but Ryan did n't hear these things, and Rose did n't notice them.

So Rose talked, Ryan smoked, and questioned intelligently, and Lucien would come in and ask about things he had composed for ladies.

"Ryan, we're nearly out of Philipson's clutches," said Rose. "At the end of this year Luce will have paid for the partnership, and then we shall have what he really makes. It is wretched to see each year a nice income made and then come the words 'less payment under agreement, March 23, 1889,' and off goes the greater part of it."

"Is n't it worth to get into Philipson's business? That other fellow — Lloyd is n't it — had to pay a lot down, had n't he?"

"Fleetwood Lloyd!" replied Rose. "Of course he did, and quite right too. What

does he know of architecture? He's done very well coming in just when Lucien's work had got known and made people talk of Philipson's. Oh, they had the best of Lucien! He should have waited."

"Should he? Why didn't he?"

"Because," said Rose, "he wanted to get married."

"That was imprudent," replied Ryan. "He should have started for himself, and when he had succeeded, if he thought marriage desirable, he could have —"

"Asked me, I suppose," said Rose; "and left me to wait for years in a cathedral city with a widowed aunt and an amorous chapter."

"Nothing is more picturesque than constancy, and if it's alleviated by the season in town, it's quite endurable. Besides, in these matters prudence should rule," declared Ryan.

"Five thousand a year!"

"*Fleur de Luce!*"

"Any news, Ryan? Still unreasonable?"

"Sir Thomas will not understand. Alice says he's very strong against the stage still, and she thinks he'd give way if I gave up my

profession. But, of course, that 's impossible. I 'm not going to give up my profession, and let Tommy Hoyle keep me and my wife. Who 's Tommy Hoyle to object to the stage? If I 'd gone into the army, it would have been different. I should have had my company by this time, and Hoyle could have settled what he liked on Alice, and I should have stuck to the regiment, and run down to Porthwick two or three times a year, and we 'd have been all right. But that can't be ; so it 's no use grieving."

"What does Alice say?"

"She never does say much, you know. I 've told her she 's not to think she 's bound to me in any way. It would n't be fair to her, would it?"

Rose knew this story of a prejudiced old man, and a proud young man. Ryan had talked of Alice till Rose believed she knew her well. Her heart went out to the girl who loved Ryan so well, who was fighting steadily to get her lover without losing her father. Sir Thomas at first had absolutely refused to consider General Locke's son as a possible son-in-law. Young Locke was a good sort enough, said Sir Thomas, before he

had run against Ryan's pride; but if his grandfather and father had ruined the family, why, he'd have to bear it. It was nonsense to think of living in any society without having what that society was founded on.

Yet Ryan visited at Porthwick, and Alice refused a good offer. Then Ryan went on the stage. Every right-thinking lady was glad dear Alice was free at last, and utterly surprised when they found she did not mean to use her freedom. Had they known of Sir Thomas's offer, and the way Ryan had received it, they would have been still more surprised.

Rose admired a girl who could do all this without losing Ryan or quarrelling with Sir Thomas. For her sake, as well as his own, she had helped Ryan as much as she could, mainly by listening to his accounts of Sir Thomas's pig-headedness. Perhaps Ryan's determination to sacrifice love to pride impressed Rose. That he should suffer by loving Alice was in the nature of things, and to be borne as well as possible; but that he, Ryan Locke, should be dependent on the Hoyle family was unthinkable, a manifest absurdity, and an outrage on human reason.

This from a man who treated every one like an equal.

Rose attracted confidences often undesired, never repelled. Her sympathy acted unconsciously. Ryan talked on till he remembered that he was talking of himself.

“Lucien’s flower” — he was fond of playing with the name he had given her — “why do you worm my inmost thoughts from me? I believe you are studying human nature. You get us under your spell, and we cannot choose but speak. Isn’t this like the Sundays at Croydon, when I was thinking of going on the stage?”

“We shall go back to the country further away when we’re better off. London all the year round takes your life out of you. In the country one can live. If Lucien makes a lot of money out of his opera off we go, and I get a garden again!” exclaimed Rose.

“What opera? When and where is it to be done?”

“Mrs. Ernestine Baumann has written the libretto, and is going to sing the soprano heroine.”

“Are there two?”

“Yes; there’s a contralto heroine as well.”

"I wonder how much of her will be left at the finish?" said Ryan.

"Ryan, don't be cynical and professional," Rose begged. "Mr. Baumann is very rich, and Mrs. Baumann hopes he'll let her act. It isn't the money she's anxious about, but whether he'll let her appear in public. She's delighted with Lucien's music; it's the best he's ever written. It will do him a lot of good. You know he's far and away better than many new composers. I'm going to have a box the first night. You'll come, won't you, Ryan? Ask for Mrs. Lucien Bewick's box."

Ryan smiled kindly at the glowing woman.

"When is it to be? I'm going on tour, you know. Engaged by cable by Thornley Slake, Esquire."

"It all depends on Mr. Baumann," replied Rose. "Everything's prepared. All the music copied, all the company selected, and the Lenæum offered at a very low rent."

"My dear, they couldn't rebuild it under six months," urged Ryan.

"Rebuild it! Why, we should only start it at the Lenæum, and transfer it to a better theatre."

“Manageress!”

“If it’s a success, Lucien will make heaps of money. That German makes ninety thousand a year,” declared Rose.

“Eighty, isn’t it?” replied Ryan. “How will this fit in with Philipson’s?”

“Like this,” said Rose, emphasising her words with beats of two right fingers on the left palm. “We go to Westport on Monday, only for a fortnight. Mrs. Baumann’s sure to know by then, because her husband must decide before he goes to Africa. If he consents, Luce will give the rest of his holiday to rehearsing.”

“If not?”

“Then he’ll go to Brittany to look after a château which he’s going to rebuild. The owner was so pleased with Lucien’s plans that he accepted them at once.”

“How does Luce like the opera idea?”

“Very much indeed; but he was never eager to get his work done in public.”

“He’s right,” declared Ryan. “Art should not be professional. I’m sure, now, it’s a mistake to make any art a daily occupation. But, theories aside, do you like the idea of Lucien taking to the stage?”

"But he'll only be at the rehearsals; when the opera's out he'll go back to work."

"It's a mistake having anything to do with the stage after a certain age," said Ryan. "You should begin early. All the same, and moralising apart, I hope the thing'll turn out well for both your sakes. You know that, don't you, Mrs. Lucien? Promise me you won't put yourself, your feelings, too much into it?"

"I could bear failure," replied Rose.

But Rose had packing to do. Ryan talked the opera over with Lucien till she came back, wished him good-night, and was kind enough to open the front door for him. "It's the only way to get rid of you," she laughed. "Can you come to us at Westport; Mrs. Valance will be there."

"Telegraph when she leaves; a pleasant holiday to you. Good-bye, *Fleur de Luce*."

Ryan Locke walking to his rooms in Sloane Street took himself seriously to task for not giving his true opinion about this opera project.

The opinion was sentimental. He didn't like the idea of either Lucien or Rose being mixed up with the stage. Not because they

were too good for it — that was all nonsense — but it wasn't their line, they were n't built that way; and Mrs. Baumann had better go to Africa with her husband, and stay there.

Meeting a trooper of the Fourth Hussars did n't brighten his mood. The ring of the spur still cut him, but the time had passed when he envied every soldier he met. He looked after the smart Hussar. A bit sprung, he seemed, but should pass with a pal at the gate.

In Sloane Street he remembered that Fellowes, who had been at Winchester with him, had a sailing-boat at Yarmouth or Lowestoft. Perhaps he could get it for Bewick, who could be trusted with a boat. Rose said he was overworked and worried about this Brittany business. If it only took him away from Mrs. Valance's eternal chatter, it would do good.

Ryan told a cabman to drive to the Universities, and resolving to write to Hastings Laurence, who was to be Mrs. Baumann's business manager, and ask him to look after Lucien, he fell asleep and woke up much refreshed as the cab stopped at the club

entrance. Fellowes was there at whist; Ryan wrote to Laurence while the game was being finished. Fellowes was a generous chap, who thought his generosity a failing, and tried to keep it in check by unnatural caution.

At first he offered to give Locke the boat outright. In the end, it seemed that every scratch on her would be repeated on his heart. Ryan promised to insure her.

"She's insured already; do what you like with her," said Fellowes, his *pro formâ* caution being worn out. "What's your friend's name? I'll give you the order now; better have the dinghy too. Come and smoke upstairs, then we can walk to Knightsbridge together. Locke, you ought to have a theatre. You'd do very well, I'm sure."

"Capital — the capital?"

"Well, you come to me! The old man, Mrs. Fellowes' father owes me a turn, so you tell me if I can help you at any time. Of course I could n't answer for it; all the old man's money is invested, and he thinks every one wants to rob him."

"Very kind of you, Fellowes; I'll remember, but it's not likely I shall trouble you."

Hence it came about that Rose Bewick, walking with Mrs. Valance on the Green at Westport a day or two after her arrival, was accosted by mercenary Suffolk mariners, whose tone and air implied that they were lending the lady a nice little boat from the goodness of their hearts. Then they gave her a letter from Ryan, in which he warned her against their rapacity. "We brought her from Lowestoft," they continued. "We put her straight yesterday, and started in a storm of rain 'bout six this morning. Then it came on to blow, and she not having been out for weeks, we had to be extra careful."

These simple seamen touched hands with England's naval heroes, but they didn't say how long the rain lasted, nor that the wind was aft, and that they had been in Westport two hours.

A Valance boy, stopped in transit, fetched Lucien, who rowed out to the half-decked little yawl, and signed for her as intact and in good condition. Lucien walked with the sailors to the station, where they drank bottled Bass and disclaimed expecting any remuneration, as Mr. Fellowes paid them all the year round.

Rose was delighted, though she never went sailing.

"Is n't that just like Ryan!" she declared. "He does everything beforehand, and *en prince*, and it falls on you all of a sudden. I'll write to him to-day; perhaps I had better telegraph, he'd like to know directly."

Rose would n't go in any ship under 3000 tons. Mrs. Valance went everywhere, but she went on the *Flight* once, and once only, and returned with a spectral complexion. After that, Lucien invited ladies in vain, and went out by himself or with a Valance boy charged to silence, so that the composer might revise his opera.

The figure of Susan veiling and unveiling, looking at him out of a mirror, appeared and reappeared. The grey-green sea over the sandbank, whence the young Valances hauled up stray crabs, reminded him of her eyes. He could n't get rid of the feeling that he had n't treated her rightly. Precisely what he should have done, he could n't say.

Lucien was trying to speak a foreign language. In his school-days boys and girls were kept apart, and at college the deification of woman was in full swing. Ruskin,

Tennyson, and a mystic tutor impressed on Lucien's reverent nature the great truth of the immaculate superiority of Woman. And worse, he was thrown among women who expressed the Anglican idea so sweetly, that any other seemed coarse and degraded. It was all very well to allow that some women were not good, but that was no practical use if you didn't meet them. If instead of going to a serious church architect in a cathedral town Lucien had learnt his work in London, he might have learnt some other things of value.

When the modern change in the feminine ideal came, Lucien had got his stamp not too deeply to fuse away in passion perhaps, but passion did not come. He astounded Leathborne by falling in love with Rose Lambert, the least Victorian of girls.

Leathborne found that it had reared a modern girl—a girl who made friendships with men, who read what she liked, talked freely, took all the pleasure she could get, and was still an English gentlewoman.

Rose made Lucien expand his feminine ideal. She didn't fit any of the niches. He made a lady chapel for her, where he served

with a love that was stronger than passion, stronger than he knew.

Rocking in the *Flight*, the cloistral life at Leathborne came suddenly back to him. The quiet streets and formal houses, the famous spire quivering in the sun, the semi-clerical functionaries, the gentle manners, and the dignified life rose before him "like a dream remembered in a dream."

He was glad he had to leave London without seeing Susan again. She would have forgotten all about him by the time they met. There was nothing to bother about, but—he wanted her to understand his behaviour. If it was n't for that he should n't think of her. A high wind kept him on land for two days. Susan did n't worry him so much now. Rose said the sailing had done him good already.

The day that the *Flight* went out again he had this letter:—

"IMPERIAL HOTEL, ST. JOSEPH'S,
"22nd July.

"DEAR ANTONIO,— You must be expecting a letter from me. I feel that. From seeing my duties to doing them, is a far cry with

me. To-day I am conscientious and bored. This is a lovely place, with miles and miles of glorious sands for galloping, and from my window I can see the little white horses racing on the dancing waves. A ship has just passed the lighthouse, with a queenly air and dainty sails like snow. I want to be in her, and sail, and sail away anywhere, as long as I don't know where. I always envy people on unknown ships. I should n't if I knew where they were going. St. Joseph's has sea in front, and on each side. Fancy stretches of ocean for thousands and thousands of miles! Newfoundland is the nearest land looking out to sea, or is it Vancouver Island?

"You're wondering how I got here. London had knocked me up; I've been quite ill since I saw you. Papa's a director of the St. Joseph's Development Company, and took me with him for his turn of inspection. We are not developing much. The company'll pay in time. Papa's companies usually do by the time he's left them. That's only fact; I think papa's very clever; he sees too far ahead, though. When does Mrs. B. open? *The Stage* says she's got the Lenæum.

You'll get me an engagement, won't you? I want one badly. Don't I beg shamefully? I'm sick of this desert, where no men abide. Man was made for society, which is woman. You're not to read the enclosed; it's for Rose, and not for masculine eyes. My very best love to Rose. Hope you're happy. — Sincerely,

“SUSANNAH.

“P. S. — I can sing soprano. — S. S.”

“Why does she call me Antonio?” asked Lucien. He pondered this question in the boat, and found but one explanation. He spent much time in the *Flight* thinking about the explanation. He was thinking of Susan all day now. Rose told him that the enclosure was the address of a stay-maker — “*Corsetière*, Susan calls it.”

Susan had delicacy.

Then came Mrs. Baumann's telegrams, a hurried departure, and a plunge into rehearsals.

CHAPTER III

Not so very long ago Lucien had looked forward eagerly to the production of his opera. Rose and he had talked it over from its beginning as separate pieces played at amateur concerts to the day when, linked with Mrs. Baumann's words, the clean copy was at last completed.

Now it was only something to bring him and Susan together. Rose's anticipation of a delighted or disgusted audience were equally indifferent. Indeed, in these last dreaming days, with the sea speaking of Susan and her letter speaking for herself, Rose had not been much in Lucien's thoughts. She may have noticed that he was preoccupied, but if so, she had attributed it to business worry, and thought it best not to say anything.

The indefiniteness of Mrs. Baumann's letter determined Lucien to go to London alone, leaving Rose to follow when he knew what his plans would be.

He found everything unsettled. He made acquaintance with the stage-manager, Mr. Ramidge, and with Mr. Shapley, the conductor. Laurence, the acting manager, he already knew. The day went in altering the cast and deciding on scenery and dresses.

Perhaps Lucien did not consciously intend to keep Rose at Westport, where he sent her an account of the state of affairs. He was ashamed of feeling glad she was not coming back immediately. She had given up her rooms, and had gone to stay with Mrs. Valance. She was glad to hear that Mrs. Baumann had engaged Susan, and was sure it was through Lucien.

The next day he went to the theatre, hoping Susan would not come. Her telegram had been vague, and, if she failed to-day, there was a good excuse for filling the part. On the way he looked in at Philipson's as usual, and had half-an-hour with Fleetwood Lloyd, just to keep his hand on things, though his holiday was n't over.

At the theatre they were rehearsing the first act. Lucien listened to his own music repeated on the piano, interrupted by Ramidge's shouts to the chorus. It sounded very

bad — not at all as it had sounded on his piano when he called Rose in to give judgment.

“Mr. Shapley,” he called from the stalls, “they’re taking the beginning of that chorus too fast, and the transition is too sudden. If you look at the score, you’ll see the change is quite gradual.”

Shapley came round to explain. It was Ramidge, it appeared. He was all for making it easy for the chorus. Shapley went back and played the passage, marking the changes for the chorus to note. Ramidge then came round to state his view. It was like that throughout the rehearsal.

Lucien heard some one talking behind him. It was Laurence pointing out structural defects to the owner’s surveyor. Behind stood Susan. Lucien thought he had never seen her looking so handsome. He saw her through the dreams of many days, and was satisfied to see her only. It was as if he had suddenly got the taste for a kind of music which had never appealed to him before.

She followed the rehearsal till Lucien turned to her. She nodded, smiling, and

waving her hand. "You are fond of your opera, Mr. Bewick," she said, shaking hands with him. "I've been expecting you to see me long ago. I've seen Mrs. Baumann. Isn't she a dear? and isn't she pretty, and so ladylike? and I've seen Laurence, and he says I'm to play in the first piece, and give the matinées. Do you like Laurence?" she asked, expressing her opinion with a grimace.

"Yes, I do," replied Lucien. "Never mind him. Come and sit with me over there." She hesitated, but returned with him. Then Lucien found the rehearsal less troublesome. The sense of responsibility had gone.

Susan's engagement had been settled, without his intervention, in the usual way of business. Beyond the introduction, he had let things take their course, and had nothing to reproach himself with. At the same time, he knew that he had stood by, careful to do nothing either way, hoping it would end as it had. He knew that if the same qualifications had been offered by any one but Susan, the engagement would not have been made. A case was being pleaded in his mind, the opposed courses were successively stated, but there was something wrong with

the judge. He apparently did not want to hear the case; he was frequently away, he made pretext to attend to something else, he told the pleaders to arrange it themselves, he made delays, and said he had no jurisdiction. Lucien felt that he was being fought for to the sound of his own music. It was the finale of the second act that woke him up.

He took Susan to lunch in the annexe at Poirier's. She thought ill of her part, and had n't listened to the music.

"What's Miss Vanlore engaged for?"

"To play Astarte if Mrs. Baumann's prevented."

"Oh, that's why the paragraphs only mentioned Mrs. Baumann as author, and said Vanlore had been specially engaged. I wonder she did it. Special terms, I suppose. Perhaps she thinks Mrs. Baumann will funk at the last. Time you were back, Mr. Composer. Coming to the stores with me first? Going to get my tonic."

"You're looking very well," he said, seeing her in daylight.

"Thanks. I am much better — ever so much better — than I was when I last saw

you. Nearly had a nervous breakdown. Didn't you think I was out of sorts?" She looked curiously at him.

"No, that I didn't," replied Lucien honestly.

"You're not observant, Mr. Bewick," she replied. "Will you remember that I was ill, quite ill that Saturday?"

"I don't see why I should. Does anything depend on your having been ill that day?"

"A great deal," laughed Susan.

Then she discussed the company till it was time to go back to the theatre. There they found Susan would not be wanted any longer.

She took an omnibus to Portland Road station, and then walked across Regent's Park towards the chapel. She was having a talk with her familiar, the Hydra-headed one. There was a great riot among them on account of the favour she had suddenly shown to one of them. All their little heads were now thrilling, and they were all talking at once.

"How much longer am I to wait?" cried one of the loudest of them. "You promised me long ago," grumbled another. "Why am

I thrown up for this fellow?" demanded another. "What's this fancy, I wonder? Why, you've known him years, and suddenly start — It's ridiculous!" "What's the use of giving you dinners and dances, if this is the way I am to be treated?" said another.

Then they began to denounce her. They called her awful names; they reminded her of many things best forgotten; they made such a noise, that she thought her head would split. But she calmed them, and soothed them with soft words and pretty promises.

"Be quiet, dears, and it'll be all right. You'll all have your turn in time. You know I treat you fairly. (Interruption.) Sh-ssh, don't be rude. What's the use of looking angry, and sad, and gloomy, you foolish creatures? This one has been waiting a long while — years, have n't you? And you thought your time would never come, did n't you? But it has, and you're happy, are n't you? You others, remember you'll lose your turns if I have any more riots."

They still grumbled and protested, but gradually quieted down to their usual con-

dition of expectant animation. One she gave sweet speech to, words of regret and worship, but she could not say much on account of the next one, which she shrank from as from the dead.

The name of the Hydra is in dispute, but all the heads had men's names, common ordinary names of to-day and last season — names they would answer to, all but the one Susan shrank from.

CHAPTER IV

LUCIEN saw Susan every day, lunched with her, shopped with her, lived for her. He was the man to know her all his life, and to be her friend, and never to think of her except as he thought of nice women. Susan had determined otherwise.

Perhaps because some magic had been wanted to allure him, perhaps because he had not felt her charm, she had encompassed him like the enchantress scorned by the hero of romance.

Like those heroes he had been armed against all spells except that most dangerous to him. Susan's spell had been cast with reckless indifference to its effect on the victim. She watched its working. At first she thought it had n't been strong enough. She went home that Saturday burning with humiliation, shame, and anger. Lucien could have no senses, she decided. It was true she had been ill. That letter she had written

solely to prick him. When he came back she saw that the spell had worked. This life, too, of rehearsals and restaurants was working for Susan just as the long dreamings in the *Flight* had worked for her. She knew the rancours and jealousies that lay under the superficial friendliness of stage-life; she knew its *fausse bonhomie*; she had known it for years, had taken to it as to her native element. But to Lucien it was the complement, the social side of artistic life. He had studied and practised music with a certain austerity, with a serious striving that had little of delight.

This association with bright, pleasant people, who took life apparently so lightly, the change from regular hours and office work, the joy of shaping his own work and of seeing it grow daily towards completeness, came too suddenly on Lucien. The æsthetic strain in his temperament had got its gratification at one burst, but it had come late.

He had taken an upper place in this new world; he had escaped the disillusioning years, and each day the old life grew dim and distant, and he forgot its claims and its

duties under the spell of a woman, under the charm of a careless life.

Meantime the opera was getting on quickly. Every one worked hard for Mrs. Baumann. As the libretto and the music came out very different from the ordinary amateur opera, people who had come only for their salaries began to take an interest in the work. Laurence had aroused a healthy rivalry between Ramidge and Shapley.

Yet Mrs. Baumann became more anxious every day. She was confident about the play, and herself too. She was a good amateur actress, and a fine singer. Laurence said failure was out of the question; no one could say how long any piece would run. He spoke to Lucien about her and her understudy.

At lunch, in the usual corner at Poirier's, Lucien told Susan that Miss Vanlore had been given the understudy of Mrs. Baumann's part.

"That comes of blue eyes and golden hair," declared Susan. "Dark men and composers always like that sort. A childlike air, and a sweet manner —"

"Add a voice and some knowledge of music," replied Lucien. "Which," said Susan,

“clearly ‘inferred’ that she had neither.” Her very current English nearly alienated Lucien. Stronger love a man cannot have. She was all right in the usual strata of speech, but when she went higher anything might happen; perhaps she was stronger further down.

“I implied nothing of the kind,” said Lucien. “By-the-bye, there’s a man looking at you,” he continued. Susan sat up pretty.

“Why, it’s papa,” she cried. “When did he come back? Didn’t you know him? You’ve seen him before?”

“Only once, and he was dressed very differently, and wore a beard.”

“Yes, yes, that’s enough,” replied Susan. “Here he is.”

A man of youthful middle age, wearing a suit of French grey cloth, patent-leather boots, and a high hat of the same colour as the clothes, was coming towards them. A rose shone in the lapel of his frock-coat, the edge of a second waistcoat (straw) was just visible above the other, and a bow of fawn cotton and a small holland umbrella, expressed, according to Mr. Glanville Stanier, the man of affairs in town in August.

He raised his hat liberally to Lucien, showing Shakesperian baldness with a border of bushy hair of true gamboge. After compliments, he inquired of Susan why she was not rehearsing.

"Interval, papa; refreshing the inner woman," said Susan promptly, meeting Lucien's glances with steadfast eyes. She had resource. "You've come up suddenly," she continued. "Good news?"

"I was wired to attend a Board Meeting," replied her father. "The monthly report of visitors to St. Joseph's sent the company's shares to $\frac{3}{4}$ — business done, $\frac{11}{16}$ x. d. The Eastwell drain scare did us good. We've circulated a paragraph referring to the growing public appreciation of St. Joseph's."

"Mention Eastwell?" asked Susan.

"The company does not wish to triumph over its neighbours. Affairs, Mr. Bewick, have their rough side; still, I have always said that even in business a gentlemanly spirit is possible. As to the opera now? It marches, I hope? Now, what do you call it?"

"'A daughter of Barbarie; or, the Captive's Bride,' is the present — the third title."

“Sinclair calls it ‘The Algerine,’ ‘The Tangerine,’ and ‘The Tambourine,’” said Susan.

“Don’t joke in business, Susan,” said Stanier. “Well now, Mr. Bewick, I suppose a romantic subject like that gives a musician an opportunity. He can show his versatility, his power of rendering the different kinds of music. You have corsairs and sailors and captives, and a Moorish girl.”

“Daughter of the Dey and Dark as Night,” interpolated Susan. “Sinclair suggested a descriptive programme in the old style, Lu—Mr. Bewick.”

“You will make use of that charming requiem of yours,” resumed Mr. Stanier.

“It was a cantata,” said Susan. “When does Sylvain come back, papa? Soon, isn’t it?”

“To-day is Tuesday; he should be back in ten days. It depends how long he has to wait for the return vessel. Through the kindness of a brother-director of The Food for the People Company, I was able to get a complimentary pass to the Levant for my eldest son, Sylvain. You’ve met him, Mr. Bewick?”

“I think so — some time since — he was just leaving school,” said Lucien.

"Yes, I was so fortunate as to get him on the foundation at St. Vedast's. The education there ranks very high now," said Mr. Stanier.

Susan's sudden announcement that it was time to go, cut short the family history. Mr. Stanier regretted being detained by a business engagement with a foreign gentleman.

"They're so fond of doing business in cafés. The custom of their own country, you know," said Stanier, ceremoniously bowing to Lucien.

"Shall I tell your mother to keep dinner, Susan?" he asked smiling.

"I sha'n't be late, papa," said Susan submissively, as they turned away. "So you didn't recognise my papa?" she laughed. "I remember he had to wear a beard last winter when his chest was bad. Lucien, was it very wicked of me to say we were going back to the theatre? You see, I wanted to go to the stores with you, and papa's so particular in some things. Isn't it ladylike to tell fibs?"

"It's not unwomanly, at all events."

"Then you don't think the worse of me?" she asked.

"My dear Susan, is it likely? What a fuss you make!"

"Lucien, does Rose tell fibs?"

"Not intentionally," said Lucien truthful, and irritated. "Don't worry any more about it, Susette. It would take a deal more than that to alter my opinion of you."

"I said you were not to call me Susette. Lucien, we'll chuck the stores; come and sit in St. James's Park instead."

A few days before this they had discovered that the slums near the Lenæum stage-door were on the verge of the Park, and they had gone through Susan's part on a seat opposite the island.

They got the same place again, where they could see the towers of the Horse Guards and the new buildings, both dull against the dull sky. For days now there had been a thick haze between the sun and the earth. Susan and Lucien agreed in cursing the weather. It disagreed with them both.

"Isn't papa looking fit?" said Susan. "Now, Lucien, tell me exactly what you think of him? Does n't he look young to have such a fine, strapping daughter?"

"The responsibility has n't aged him. He's like you, Susan (I wasn't going to say Susette). You have the same gestures, the

same voice, but you don't talk in the same way."

"Papa's much more fluent than I am," replied Susan; but she was fluent enough to tell him a great deal about her father. Usually she was extremely cautious and reticent. Suddenly she burst into intimate confidences, told Lucien of her father's high descent, shown by a curve of the nose and shape of hands that were transmitted to the true Staniers. Sylvain had n't these signs, she said; he took after the mother. Susan deplored the fallen fortunes of the family. The true doctrine was, according to her, that the Staniers were badly treated when the Church property was cut up. They got a miserable two hundred acres of Welsh moorland instead of the lands of Valle Crucis Abbey. Ever since then they had been working upward till they reached their present culmination in Glanville Stanier. He was a company promoter. He had a genius for finance. He had been concerned in the formation of more companies than almost any one. Out of one of his companies a cousin of his had made a fortune. He had promised to give papa twenty per cent of his profits; but he had settled the money in trust

on her mother, so that they only received the interest. If papa had been paid the money honestly, he'd have made several fortunes with it.

Women are more interesting than their subjects. Lucien was not interested in the Staniers ancient or modern, with one exception. He had an idea of the sort of finance Stanier was connected with, and he seriously doubted the story of the Welsh estate. But when a man has reached a certain state of emotion, he can endure anything that will let him look and look and follow each flicker of lip-nerves, meet each glance of eyes, or learn the finer granulation of pink on bran-splashed cheeks. The stream of confidence flows on while he observes the length and inclination of an eye-lash, or sees the difference between an upper *circonflex* lip and a lower of bee-stung fulness.

And if the state is spiritual, too, these trivial confidences, this course of egotism seems to bring them closer and closer, to knit him and her together, to shut off the outer world, to excite dreams of union, of union that is not possible.

She talked and still she talked, and he

questioned so that she talked more. People passed and she scarcely noticed them, though, until she was borne along by her own volubility, Susan watched each passer-by, watched by habit that was nature first.

"Really, Lucien," Susan broke off, "I don't know why I tell you all this. You must be bored to death."

"So would I die."

"Why will you talk like that," she exclaimed, getting up. "You've let me talk till it's too late to walk, and too early to ride."

"Walk part of the way."

"No, I shall go by train," she decided.

They walked together as far as the corner of the Gardens.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand.

"Oh! I'll see you to the station."

"Good-bye, Lucien." The hand was still out. He took the hand and had turned away.

"I might as well fetch that Lytton," said Susan coolly. "He's my favourite novelist."

"You've a key?" she asked, when they reached the flat. "Will Sharpe be in?"

"I suppose so. Why?"

They went into the dining-room. Lucien looked among the shelves for "Night and Morning."

"When was I here last?" asked Susan.

"Just before I went away."

"Time I went away."

"Shall I see you to the station?"

"If you like," said Susan, from the passage.

"What does this card mean? Out!"

"Oh, Sharpe's gone out for something."

Susan would open the door, and she let the catch go. Trying to fix it, she got her hands crossed. "Oh, bother!" she said, as the spring flew back again.

One arm drooped at her side; her eyes drooped too. She was half-turned from Lucien. As he stretched behind her towards the handle, his arm touched her waist, and his head bent over hers. He remembered his oversight the last time, and yet he controlled himself.

"You must n't do that! You sha'n't! It would spoil our friendship if you kissed me," cried Susan, timing the speech beautifully as the door opened. "Lucien, remember I don't allow that sort of thing," proceeded Susan.

She could n't have been angrier if he had kissed her. Lucien could n't deny an inclination; he could n't admit having conquered it.

"I should n't do such a thing without your consent," he replied.

"In writing, I suppose," said Susan. "What are you talking about, Lucien? What are you thinking about? What's come to you?"

"I'm thinking about you usually," said Lucien.

"And forgetting Rose?" she said sharply.

"Of course, that follows."

"But why? What have I done that you should think — Lucien, was it because I — you remember that Saturday before you left?"

"We're in the street. People will notice," he said, as they reached the station. That was her speech, thought Susan, the woman's speech — she should have said it.

He got her ticket, and saw her into a carriage.

"Lucien," she whispered, as the train went off, "don't look so melancholy handsome. I may forgive you. Good-bye till to-morrow."

At home Lucien found a telegram from Rose, saying that she was returning with Mrs. Valance to-morrow.

Rose duly came with him to rehearsal, curious to see this theatre life. She looked radiant after her stay at Westport. She was shocked at Mrs. Baumann's appearance.

"Ernestine, what is the matter?" she exclaimed. "You look quite ill. You're not taking proper care of yourself, I know. Come back to lunch with us, will you? and get a rest. I'm going to see the rehearsal with Lucien. I've been introduced to such a lot of people. They call you 'the little lady.' Isn't it nice of them? You're going to begin now. Chorus of Christian captives; they don't look specially Christian, do they, Ernestine?"

"Late again, Lucien," said Susan. "How's your guilty self this morning? I beg your pardon; I didn't see Rose, and I didn't know you! Really I see so badly. I am awfully glad to see you. How well you look, dear; quite the prettiest woman here. That's Miss Vanlore, the one with the flaxy hair. Not really pretty, is she?" Susan ran on, hoping Rose would n't notice her sudden

reddening. She had been taken by surprise. As usual, she had planned her day. It included Bewick, and would have to be altered; so when Rose asked her to lunch she excused herself with many thanks, and without direct asking, found that Rose would n't come back in the afternoon.

"May I leave my part in your room, Mr. Bewick. I know where it is. I can't walk about London, and let every one see what I am," said Susan, at the interval.

Rose went behind the stage, round the dressing-rooms, and into the cupboard they had given Lucien for a room. At lunch she said the theatre was too dirty, dingy, stuffy, and hideous for any human being.

"My dear Mrs. Bewick," said Mrs. Baumann, "you're too sensitive. It'll go off! I felt like that the first day."

"I sha'n't feel clean all day," said Rose. "Well, Lucien, you won't get me to that place often. I'll see the other acts rehearsed, and that'll be enough for me, particularly if the company have n't any better idea of music than they had to-day. Was n't it bad, Lucien? Are they musicians? Mrs. Baumann, you and Miss Vanlore were the

only people who paid any attention to the music. That tenor can't read a note. I saw that at once. And the others, oh!"

After a few more visits she saw that a lofty standard was out of place in an entertainment meant for the general public. Her dislike of the theatre remained, and she soon gave over going to rehearsals. She got to hate the theatre life, which took Lucien away all day, and made him so different from himself. He was never at rest now. In the evenings either he was seeing Mrs. Baumann, or Ramidge called, or one of the company came to try a song. It was telling on Lucien. He was absorbed, or tetchy, or in wild spirits. To-night Susan was coming.

Susan was late for dinner, and full of cut-and-dried excuses. Afterwards she and Lucien practised in the music-room. How wearisome it was to hear him repeat his directions! Then she began again in exactly the same key. She was very careless; it was only a matter of the time and keeping in one key till the change — a simple transition.

"Rose, dear," said Lucien, entering suddenly, "just come and show Susan how to sing this."

For no reason Rose felt her heart thrill, unless it were that he was speaking to her as he used to.

"Oh, you artist-children!" she laughed, going to the music-room with him.

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Bewick," exclaimed Susan. "It was Lucien's fault. It was quite unnecessary."

She was red and hot, and out of temper.

"That change is difficult if you're not absolutely right in the time," said Rose, taking the music.

Lucien touched the piano.

"Try it over slow," he said.

Rose sang it through correctly and easily.

"That's very kind of you, Mrs. Bewick. I see now. I won't go on now; my voice is tender. I ought to be moving."

She was putting her hair straight, when suddenly it all came down in a stream of copper with black shadows. Lucien saw a new Susan, who suggested quite a different set of ideas. Odd how the mere arrangement of her hair alters a man's idea of a woman. Up to now Susan's hair had seemed to him to have an especially outdoor air. That long, straight mass of colour,

making the face pale, stayed with him all night.

A day later Rose went to stay with some friends near London. Lucien was glad, and owned that he was glad. Rose hampered him very much now. She would interfere, make plans suddenly, and come to the theatre without telling him before. She was awfully in the way; she might see that. These thoughts passed through his mind on his way. They seemed quite natural, attracted no challenge from himself. He saw nothing strange in them.

Without effort or intention he had become indifferent to Rose. She seemed to have no more claim on him than Mrs. Baumann or any other of his lady friends. There was no repulsion. He still perceived her attractions; admired her as he might admire a work of art; but for him she had no charm, no appeal. He admitted this feeling not as curious or dishonourable, but of something quite in the usual course of events. He was morally paralysed as regards Rose. Her absence appeared not so much fortunate as obvious. It gave him the free association with Susan which was now a necessity of his life. Rose

went, forgotten except for some perfunctory letters. Susan remained, a comrade in work, a companion in pleasure.

At their first meeting after Rose had left, Susan discussed their position in plain language. She gave pretty names to her own qualities — this she calls frankness.

“We will sit here,” she said, as they passed some chairs near the bridge in St. James’s Park. “Lucien, you’re making a mistake. Let’s understand one another. You fancy you’re in love with me.”

“My dear Susan, I admit the fact.”

“Do you fancy I’m in love with you?” she asked.

“No, dear, I don’t,” said Lucien. Susan smiled.

“Why do you do it, then?” she asked. “Listen, Lucien. I like you very much, and I want always to be friends, but you must n’t talk about being in love with me.”

“I did n’t.”

“Well, I did,” she rejoined; “it’s best to be frank about these things. You know it’s wrong and foolish, and can’t lead to anything. Can it, now? Let’s hear no more of it, and be as we were.”

"If you don't want me to talk of it, I won't," said Lucien; "but that won't alter the fact."

"What fact? I don't admit that you love me," she replied. "You've no right to. Do you mean to say I led you on?"

"No, I don't say that for a moment," exclaimed Lucien. "I should n't like to think that."

"Some girls do more than you'd think," said Susan.

"I've never met them, and I don't want to," said Lucien. "You need n't bother about me, Susan. I sha'n't talk about it, or worry you. Let's go on as before. Forget that I love you. I sha'n't remind you, though I shall love you, all the same."

"There you go again, breaking your promise as you make it," she replied, getting up. "Well, I've said what I ought, Lucien, so now you know. You need n't come to the stores with me to-day."

"It's my way home, so we can go so far together."

"So far, and no further," she laughed; and yet he went to the stores with her, and had tea there, and walked nearly home with her.

That was Susan's way. Her speech and her actions contradicted one another.

Her proper attitudes scarcely lasted long enough for a snapshot. If she meant what she said, she should have restricted her association with Lucien to purely business matters. She knew well enough that he was not able to insist on keeping on the present terms, and she knew he was not the sort of man to annoy a woman.

If her attitude had been sincere, she would have reconciled her words and her actions. But one man in August is worth many in the season, and he can be dropped when people come to town. Besides, Lucien might be useful professionally, and Rose knew a lot of people, and, moreover, Lucien was amusing. He was so young, compared to a girl who had begun life, of a sort, at sixteen. He didn't know women, of a sort, a little bit. He believed them. He didn't seem to know his strong points; he thought every man was a gentleman, that every one had been, or could have gone, to the 'Varsity, and that every one was as good-looking or bad-looking as himself. And besides, and above all, he was very, very much gone on her, Susan

Stanier, and that, too, was amusing. It had taken a good deal of doing, she admitted, but it had been done.

As she thought of Rose, absent, trusting, and ignorant, Susan thrilled with triumph.

Rose's husband! That was success in more than one sense.

CHAPTER V

THROUGH a sunless August till September brought the opening night irritatingly near, Lucien and Susan passed their days together, lovers except for some forbidden words, some unpermitted caresses. Sometimes Susan would pull him up, usually by referring to Rose. She kept up the fiction of ignoring the fact when it suited her. For days she let his love-language pass, then on some casual "dearest" she would flare up.

"Lucien, drop that," she would say, setting her features to dignity. "Keep those names for your wife. You're breaking the compact."

The effect of such speeches was spoilt because Susan looked especially handsome when she put on dignity, and stared at Lucien from widened green eyes; spoilt, also, because she soon relapsed into the most intimate confidences about herself — always about herself, and her family as affecting herself.

In the lunch hours spent in St. James's Park she talked of herself as freely as girls talk to their betrothed lovers — *l'égoïsme à deux*, but Susan's was the egoism they shared. That he could endure this flood of trivial confidence about her "art," her ambitions, her childhood, her youth, her home, what she thought last year or yesterday, gave the measure of Lucien's infatuation.

"Girls ought to like their mother best, oughtn't they?" she said once as they sat in the familiar path where they could see the cupola of the Horse Guards dull against the low grey clouds. "I don't; father's my favourite. I think a lot of him. He's very unlucky. His family never treated him properly, never helped as they might. He only wanted capital. He'd have been rich long ago if he'd had only a little capital. Look at that Domestic Supply Company; that was his idea. He started that Natural Hair-pin Company. Here's one. Look, Lucien, it matches the hair, and never falls out if you put it in carefully. Papa's full of ideas, and he can explain them so well. People believe him. Then he's so gentlemanly. Don't you think his manners lovely?"

He reminds me of the *grands signors* (*seigneurs*, is it?). He's more of the gentleman than you are, Lucien."

"Are there degrees?" he asked.

Susan hesitated. She feared Lucien's social standard, and suspected irony in his simplest judgments. "Papa has a grant of arms," she continued. "The right to bear arms makes a gentleman. Our grant came from Henry VI. Did your family have a grant of arms, Lucien?"

"I never heard of it," said Lucien. "They did n't wait for it."

"Then they could be hanged."

"They were, dear. An unchanged Bewick could n't be laid. His ghost wailed at nights for having broken the family record."

"You've no romance, Luce, not a bit, or you would n't chaff. You're a plebeian, Luce; I'm an aristocrat."

"Our hangings go a long way back."

"The quarterings are more important," laughed Susan. "Did you see that old lady smiling at us? She thinks we're engaged. It's awfully silly going on like this, Lucien. What did your friend, Mr. Shepherd, say? He'll think we're always together. That was the third time he's seen us."

"When I told him you were playing in my opera he thought it quite natural. Would you like to see André Doherty in 'A Counter Countess?' Shepherd offered me a box."

"Yes, I should. Luce, may I bring papa and the mater? They'd like to go. All right; get it for Friday, dear. See how catching your bad habit is. Not that it means anything. I often call men dear," she went on. "I like Shepherd, Luce. Wish there was more of him. He's a gentleman, Luce. You know an awful lot of gentlemen. Don't look so surprised. You know what I mean; if you don't, pretend to. Every one's friends are not gentlemen."

"Oh, I think they are. I never met —"

"As if your experience was the rule," said Susan. "Sometimes, Luce, you are too irritating. You do it on purpose, I believe. Surely you know every one has n't been to a public school and to college, and lived with nice people all their lives — not but what they're just as good."

"Just what I say. You'll be a Radical in time, Susan."

"Ladies are always Conservatives," replied Susan seriously. "Luce, does Shep-

herd talk about us — women, I mean, you know ? ”

“ He said something about my having got hold of another pretty woman. ”

“ Another ! He said pretty. Not handsome. Most people call me handsome. Is he fond of fair women ? ”

“ Who ? Shepherd ? I don’t know, really. I think he ’s indiscriminate. ”

“ Is that polite for promiscuous, ” said Susan. “ I do like to shock you ! Did Shepherd say whether André Doherty was still living with Lord Fulham ? Have I shocked you again ? Do you think an unmarried girl ought n’t to know such things, or ought n’t to speak of them ? Isn’t it ladylike ? Lots of ladies do. Lucien, you are funny about ladies, about women. It’s a great drawback being brought up among Anglican angels. Perhaps I rather give my sex away. I talk so freely with you, Lucien. You make me do it. You draw me out, and then you go away, and think I’m not modest or ladylike. ”

“ Oh no, I don’t. ”

“ Then you ought to. A man ought to value purity in a woman. It’s only one illu-

sion more. Personally, I think it much more attractive in a man. Not that I'm a New Woman. Oh no! I'm made on a very old pattern," sighed Susan. "That's why I always get on with men. Women don't like me; they may n't say so, but they don't. Women are awfully envious, Luce, and of course I don't like them."

Out of the fulness of her desire Susan talked in this style to Lucien day after day. The Park was saturated with her revelations; scarcely a path or a prospect that had not its secret, scarcely a spot where Susan had not left some of herself.

In time she had told him so much that it was safe to let him see the Stanier family at their residence in Apple-tree Place, a turning out of the Circus Road. It was a house of late Gothic — Pugin, filtered through a speculative builder. From the road the mullioned windows and tiled roof were just visible through a screen of foliage extending for many yards around. It gave a sense of spaciousness; the mellow brick wall suggested an ancestral house, and in the afternoon, when the milkman had gone, the quiet was cloistral.

At least this was Glanville Stanier's expression as he welcomed Lucien at the garden door and led him along a yard and a half of flagstone to a trellised porch, where Mrs. Stanier was cutting French beans into a pie-dish.

"There's ma doing the complete housewife," exclaimed Susan angrily, as her mother fled leisurely. "Papa, look after Mr. Bewick, will you? I sha'n't be a minute."

She plunged indoors, and then arose a sound of sweet voices jangled. Mr. Stanier rose to the occasion, and offered Lucien whiskey and soda.

"I'm sorry you won't have any," he said, confident of having followed the usage of good society, "because I know all about our whiskey. In fact, we make it. Not here, of course; the company, I mean," he interpolated, noting Lucien's alarm — "the Rectifiers' Company, you know. I'm on the Board. We're doing very well; went up $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ last week. You see the public take to a good thing, and when they compare the analysis of our Diamond Blend with the finest Scotch whiskey on the market, and see how low our percentage of fusel-oil is — well, they

can't stand out against that. Being distillers and rectifiers, and supplying the public at their own doors, we put our stuff on the market at a price which disheartens all competitors."

"Nice place you've got, Mr. Stanier," said Lucien.

"Yes, it is, Mr. Bewick. We call it 'The Retreat.' The name's on the porch, but the convolvulus has grown over it," replied Mr. Stanier. "No, we've no kitchen garden; that's the wall of next door. They've a lot of ground. The other side? that's the garden of the corner house. It runs right down to us, and that other one is the street wall."

Thus lopped and shorn, "The Retreat" was merely a house with a margin. A few paces in any direction brought the visitor to an alien wall masked by trained creepers.

"They've robbed you of your garden."

"You see, Mr. Bewick," explained Stanier, "the landlord built that house for himself, and of course gave himself a good garden; and the owner of the other house bought the other strip to prevent being overlooked. But my little place is just as pleasant, and from

the bath-room window, where you can't see the other houses, the whole place seems to belong to 'The Retreat,' you'll see for yourself. It's time to get ready for dinner. We're coming, dear," he said to a girl who had come to the door. Lucien thought she was an elder Susan. "Alice, you know Mr. Bewick?"

The girl took off her glasses and became a younger Susan. She shook hands rather awkwardly, and coloured shyly. "It's all ready, papa," she said, in a voice as rich and soft as Susan's was flat and hard.

They assembled in the apsidal drawing-room like outlaws taking sanctuary, suggested Sylvain Stanier, the eldest son, engaging Lucien in conversation during an unusually long *quart d'heure*. Mrs. Stanier, an ample lady in a black silk dress, which still looked well in twilight, left the room suddenly, followed by Susan and Alice.

"Since I left St. Vedast's, where the pater had got me on the foundation, so I was educated on the cheap," said Sylvain — "well, since then I must have been in fourteen different companies dealing with nine or ten different businesses; consequently, besides

knowing company administrations thoroughly, including winding up, I'm familiar with nine or ten different trades. Take me on wood, iron, aluminium, drugs, electric motors, and artificial incubators, and one or two other things, and I know 'em backwards. That's a rare thing at my age. Suppose I'd gone to college — I could have got an exhibition at St. Vedast's — well, what should I have been doing now? schoolmastering or tutoring at best; as it is —— ”

At this point Mrs. Stanier and Susan returned, the first flushed, the other angry.

“ You 'll pardon our keeping you so long,” said Mrs. Stanier, “ but we 've had a bit of an upset. The girl's willing —— ”

“ That 'll do, mamma,” interrupted Susan. “ Mr. Bewick won't care for the details.” She smiled at Lucien to soften the formal Mister, and caught him admiring her blouse *gorge-de-pigeon*.

“ The ‘ Trained Servants' Supply ’ would have prevented this kind of thing,” said Mr. Stanier, observing his hair in the glass. “ We had got so far, Mr. Bewick, as to know of all the worthless servants in W., S.W., and N.W. postal districts. The directors

gave way before the complaints, and demands for compensation. 'Live it down,' I said; 'we've got our experience and made our mistakes, now we can profit by them.' But they felt it impossible to live down the case of the cook who had gone with her sweetheart to a Mansion House ball with the tickets intended for the family. After that, ladies lost confidence in the company. Yet I still think it one of my best ideas."

Mrs. Stanier enlivened the interval with recollections of her servants, till Alice announced that dinner was ready this time. Lucien offered his arm to Mrs. Stanier.

"Oh, never mind that; it's go as you please with us 'cept when my husband has a business dinner, and then there's always a jam in the doorway."

The dinner-table had been decorated and laid out according to the directions of the lady who wrote the "How to Entertain" column in *Gentle Dames*. The alternative direction, "this can be done more cheaply in —, and looks nearly as well," had been carefully followed and reinforced by Susan's aid; she had all a woman's natural taste. As Lucien noticed nothing remarkable except

a strip of soft matting with alternate squares of yellow and red in the famous Carnatic style which blazed along the centre of the table, the effort may be regarded as successful.

Conversation ranged widely. It included inaccurate recollections of things in the paper promptly challenged and miscorrected, Susan's prospects of success once on the stage, the merits of the many different likenesses of her, whether Alice would get into the Post Office, and the private lives of actresses famous or obscure.

The *hors d'œuvres* and table appointments were charged with memories. There was a cucumber cutter which sliced the pears, and a pepper mill which set the teeth on edge; there was a patent mustard, and an improved salt, and strange creatures of metallic flavour from tins. These and others had their histories, written by Registrars.

"Mr. Bewick," asked Sylvain, "are you fond of fancy edibles? Try some potted Iguana. Oh, it's right enough. We eat it like butter. The pater took two or three cases and some buffalo marrow-bones as against director's fees of the Delicacies Company; did n't you, father?"

"It ought to have done, that company," said Mr. Stanier, "but the Iguana spoilt it. I don't know whether there 's a season for the Iguana, or whether it has a poisonous congener. At all events, we had a whole consignment condemned, and newspaper correspondence."

This reminiscence dimmed his bright confidence for a few moments.

"I don't say Mr. Stanier's any cleverer than other men," whispered Mrs. Stanier to Bewick, "but for noticing and imagining things, he 's one in a million. I always say he 'd 've done well as a poet. He 'll cheer up in a minute, he 's as buoyant as a nautilus."

Susan was relieved when dinner was over. All the time she thought Lucien was criticising everything. She admired and resented his way of assuming that everything was as it should be. He always did that. It was excessively irritating, and attractive too. Really, it was a kind of conceit, and Susan meant to tell him so. He looked so gentlemanly in his evening dress, talked so easily on her mother's topics, and appeared so much interested in her father's finance, that Susan admired him more than ever.

The men went to smoke in Mr. Stanier's

study, or office as he rightly called it. He pointed out how completely and compactly it was furnished as a place of business. He was proud of his talent for method.

“Various sizes of paper, you see, Mr. Bewick, and envelopes, lettered files, &c. &c. ; nothing that other people can’t get, but they don’t. The *Postal Guide* for the current quarter. On one occasion my familiarity with the *Guide* saved a law suit. In those drawers, numbered and dated, are the correspondence with each of my companies.”

He walked about talking, Lucien thought, quite naturally, showing the little devices he used to make the most of the small room, referring to odd experiences, old ideas that had failed, others that had succeeded with other men, and explaining new ideas with such combined enthusiasm and discretion, that they were quite unintelligible.

“Coffee in the garden, papa,” said Alice, entering. “Come. Susan says you’re all to come, and you’re not to swamp Mr. Bewick with figures. How you’ve been talking,” she said, smoothing his bushy back hair through which he had run his fingers so that it stood out like a halo.

"We are coming," replied her father, as Alice and her mother went out. "Susan thinks I shall bore you, Mr. Bewick. I've a bad habit of thinking that what interests me interests every one. Do you think Alice like me?" he asked suddenly.

"Not so much as your other daughter."

"In appearance, no; in disposition, yes. She has my love of order and method, more perseverance though, less imagination. Not so good-looking and adventurous as Susan, but more hard-working. She keeps us all straight. Clever, too, with figures and language, a great manager. She's working very hard for this examination. She'll get in."

They sat in the garden talking and smoking till twilight became dusk and till darkness followed dusk, obliterating the boundary walls so that the dim foliage made one vast pleasaunce.

"You're a great friend of Susan's, aren't you?" said Alice, as Lucien helped her to take the chairs in. "I'm glad I've seen you; I like to know or to see all Susan's friends. You think she's clever, don't you?"

"Undeniably clever," said Lucien. "She can" — he hesitated conscientiously.

"Well, Mr. Bewick, what can she do? She can't do anything. She can't sing or act or paint," continued Alice, resting a moment. "Still she's clever, not in doing anything, but in herself, in her head."

It was too dark for Lucien to see her face, but he thought she was smiling; and when she stood beside him at the piano while he played bits from the opera, Lucien had the impression that she smiled curiously when he was not looking at her.

"Rehearsal at eleven, isn't it?" said Susan, as she went a little way down the road with him. "You've not been bored, Luce — Mr. Bewick?" She laughed at the formal name. "Luce, you understand, I must behave before people; you know, don't you? Has it been a bore, Luce?"

"I've been very happy, Susan. I have really." He took her hand, and she held his.

"Pity we're in the road, isn't it?" she said, looking into his eyes. "There's no hurry, is there, Luce?"

Still she held his hand as if loth for him

to go. It was very quiet now. Neither spoke. Susan looked pale; her hair seemed black, her pulse beat against his hand. Suddenly she released it, saying lightly, "Tomorrow at eleven," just as Sylvain, in not quite noiseless shoes, stepped to her side.

"I'll come to the 'bus with you," he said. "Coming, Susie?"

"In my slippers!" exclaimed Susan, retiring.

At lunch the next day Susan's mood was different — matter-of-fact and chilly. After tea she revived, and in St. James's Park discussed the dinner-party with her usual freedom. She was anxious about Lucien's opinion of her family, and accused him of being fastidious and superior, of being easily bored, and of insincerity for concealing it.

"Really, I enjoyed it immensely," he protested.

"Oh, don't speak as if you expected to meet a lot of savages!" she exclaimed.

"Very well, then; I sha'n't tell you of a mistake you made," he replied.

"How you watch me! Tell me, Lucien. Was it another ephemeral — ephemeral, is

it? I'll drop that word; it's dangerous. Well, was it? I like to know my faults," said Susan.

"Well, the author of 'Hudibras' was n't a bishop, nor was he called Berkeley."

"Was n't he? Did I say he was? Oh, I see you mean that — 'no matter' — story. Glad you told me. Butler and Berkeley, two B.'s; confusing, is n't it? Sometimes one picks up things at the wrong end. Did you notice anything else?"

"Only a different Susan, a home Susan, which I have put next the society Susan."

"And where do you put the real Susan?"

"Next my heart," said Lucien, too promptly.

"Do you talk like that because of last night?" she exclaimed. "Then you make a mistake. I'm going by 'bus," she continued, as she rose from the chair. "I sha'n't be down in the daytime to-morrow; eight will be time enough for the dress-rehearsal I suppose?"

"The farce is called for seven," said Lucien, as they walked towards the Horse Guards.

He did not see her again till the next

morning, when they were going through the first piece. The make-up and the footlights and a dress of electric blue brought out Susan's beauty into cameo-like distinctness. The curves of a straw hat and the masses of glowing hair were an outer and inner frame for the fine lines of her face. Lucien had not seen her on the stage till now. The new experience, the emphasising of a familiar personality, thrilled him strangely, yet not so much as to check an instinctive protest against an abruptness of gesture and awkwardness of movement Susan could not conquer. His perceptions of form, and to a less degree of colour, were uncontrollably impartial. In his position most men would have looked through a haze of sentiment. Lucien's senses were too fine to allow him to do that, and perhaps this recognition of Susan's limitations made her hold on him the greater. At the end he knew that Susan looked her best in repose; she could not manage the broken lines of movement. Of course, with him, the æsthetic qualities obscured the emotional, and extinguished the intellectual. He could not help noticing the inadequacy of her voice; but how far she expressed the feel-

ings of a young lady poised between love and duty, he did not attempt to estimate.

The actors hurried away to change for the opera, while the scene swiftly ascended to the flies. Ramidge, shouting, running, and moving furniture, was everywhere at once, or his lilac-gloved hands seemed to be. New lilac gloves at dress-rehearsal were a tradition with him; some people, like Shapley, might come in evening dress, or like Laurence might make no difference, but Ramidge, always *très soigné* on these occasions, completed a careful toilet with gloves invariably lilac. That after the first shift he looked like an upholsterer's man working in his Sunday clothes did not matter. The point was to start in the right spirit.

Lucien went to Rose and Horace Shepherd in the dress circle.

"What a pretty scene, Lucien!" said Rose. "Have you settled whether it's Morocco or Algiers yet? Does it remind you?" she said, in a lower tone. It did, though Lucien did not want to be put in mind of their wedding trip, and scarcely returned the pressure of her hand.

"Bewick, do you think those ships are

right?" asked Shepherd. "They've different courses, all of them, and yet the wind strikes their sails in the same way. We never get such accommodating winds, do we, Mrs. Bewick?"

"From Africa always something new."

"Lucien, you know why I like Horace?" said Rose.

"So difficult not to."

"No, it's because he's myriad-minded," she continued. "He expresses general humanity. At the first dress-rehearsal he's been to he becomes critical; he knows how everything ought to be done, how the scenes should be arranged, how the piece should be written, how the people should act — all except Miss Stanier, of course. Isn't that what every one does, or would do?"

"Oh, that's how he reveals Shakespeare, is it?"

"All right, Bewick, I'll tell you afterwards," said Shepherd. "Didn't Miss Stanier act well? and isn't she handsome?"

"Reminds one of a Fragonard! Sèvres porcelain! Venetian hair! that's what I've had to endure," laughed Rose. "Poor Horace, I must introduce you to a gentleman named Dugald Miller."

"She did n't tell me she was engaged," said Shepherd.

"You anticipate; you are so eager, you men. You have three stages: Infatuation Engagement, and Marriage."

"Next, please. They 're four," said Shepherd.

"Then happiness," said Rose quickly. She disliked the jokes against marriage. "Engagement's not nearly so interesting as what goes before. Dugald Miller's going before. Ask Miss Stanier about agricultural chemistry, Horace."

"Oh! that's his line, is it? Whereabouts?" said Shepherd.

"Pity him, Lucien!" replied Rose. "Never mind, Horace, you'll get over it. Lucien, tell me who that lady is? Oh, that's Miss Vanlore, is it? She looks clever. Does n't the theatre look odd, Horace without an audience? Like a ball-room without the dancers."

Except in the stalls, where some of the company in their stage-dress were sitting, and in the pit, where sat a few of the employés, the brilliant theatre was bare. The seats stood out barely in lines and curves of

red plush or crimson baize. The groups in the stalls shifted their colours as things were joined or left by Algerine Arab or captive. Red and blue and yellow, entire or in stripes, on various grounds thrown up by the dark mass of the orchestra and the soft red of the fauteuils came, paused, and went in the rose-strained glow of electric lamps.

Behind the curtain rose the voice of Ramidge, above the bustle of stage men and the footfall of chorus ladies.

Shapley took the conductor's seat, tapped with his baton; the tuning ceased, and then after a little pause Lucien's overture began. It was a summary of the opera. The triumphant entry of the returning corsairs, their welcome from their countrymen, and the wail of Christian captives, shot through and held together by the love-songs of the Princess and the Spanish captain fell in swathes of ordered sound. It was well given, and got a round of applause.

"All very well," whispered Shapley to the leader as they waited Ramidge's signal for the opening chorus, "but too musical for the public. We sha'n't get a hand on the night."

Then the chorus of Algerines gave their

welcome to the victors ; and the first act went smoothly on, while Ramidge made hurried notes of entrances and business.

Mrs. Baumann sang and acted admirably. Ramidge and Shapley congratulated her sincerely when the curtain fell on the discovery of her meeting with Don Gesualdo, the hero.

“ Stop, ladies,” cried Ramidge to the chorus. “ Ring up, please. One or two things a bit wrong. End of opening chorus, Mr. Shapley. No, you don’t go off like a regiment of soldiers. Break up gently ; melt away like a crowd. Why, you were all right yesterday. Try it again. We ’ve got all night before us. ”

And there he kept them till they got it right, and so with other things ; and in the chorus-room they called him hard names, and scoffed at the gloves of lilac.

The second act was interrupted by a difference between Shapley and the tenor, and some difficulty with the seashore. These had been got over ; the Princess had just delivered her touching farewell to the home of her childhood, when Laurence called to Mrs. Baumann from a group of leaders.

“ An African telegram — reply paid. I

thought it would be from Mr. Baumann, and urgent perhaps," he whispered.

Mrs. Baumann paled under her colour.

It was from Mr. Baumann, and urgent, and Teutonically brutal.

"Withdraw my consent to your acting. Don't want to be made ridiculous. — CARL BAUMANN."

"Read," she said, holding out the trembling message to Laurence.

"What a blackguard thing to do," he exclaimed. "Why couldn't he have said so a week ago, or yesterday?"

"I feared this all the time," said Mrs. Baumann. "There are reasons why I cannot take my own course. I would, but that's what he wants. I should like to! I'd give anything to do it. Isn't it cruel, Mr. Laurence? Isn't it mean? Isn't it German?" she added bitterly.

She shook with indignation, and turned away. Laurence waited in pity.

"It was my treat," she said, looking at him with tears in eyes and voice; "my promised pleasure, my long promised pleasure. I longed for it so. Studied and practised and waited very long. And it's my

own piece ; and they say I'm good in it. You think so, don't you — really — honestly now ? You don't flatter, Mr. Laurence ? ”

“ You converted me long ago, Mrs. Baumann. You would have made a real success. I am very, very sorry for your disappointment. You can't go on. Ah, well you know best. We'd better stop the rehearsal and tell Ramidge.”

Ramidge and the ballet-master were directing the kaleidoscopic ballet, the chief item in the revels given by the Dey in honour of his daughter's marriage with the Prince of Morocco.

“ We've four minutes more,” he said, in reply to Laurence's whisper. “ Tell the little lady I must see this through, Bayadères now, Solano,” he whispered to the ballet-master as the bright cohorts of the ballet swept in rays of colour down the stage, faced the footlights, reversed, and then wheeled in a haze of throbbing spectral electric colours.

“ Chromatics right at last, Solano. That's all right, ladies. Excellent ! Capital ! Remember your times to-morrow. You'll be off in a few minutes and get a rest,” said Ramidge to the panting girls as he went to-

wards Shapley. "Oh, you Bedouins! You're still too fast. How often am I to tell you to take your time from the band. Like to try it again, Shapley," he suggested, reviving the ancient unpopularity of the children of the desert, who were audibly reviled by the other races.

Fortunately Mrs. Baumann and Laurence and Lucien distracted Ramidge's attention. He was aghast at the news, declared that the piece must be postponed, and washed his hands of all responsibility.

"Hang it all, Ramidge, we don't want to give the whole thing away. Come to my room or Mrs. Baumann's and talk the matter over. You're alarming the whole theatre," said Laurence, moving away.

But it was too late. The band and the chorus had seen and heard too much. When Mrs. Baumann and the others returned, every one knew that something was wrong. The theatre was full of rumours, vague or precise. The general opinion, founded on experience, was that the money was not right, though the romantic temperament inclined to something revealing about Mrs. Baumann. Apprehension was slightly calmed when Miss

Vanlore took Mrs. Baumann's part for the rest of the second act. Lucien sent Susan a note saying he had recommended her for Miss Vanlore's part, and then went to Rose, told her what had happened, and asked Shepherd to see her home directly the act was over.

"I'd rather stay here, Lucien," declared Rose. "I sha'n't be frightened if there is any quarrelling."

"There's no need for you to stay," replied Lucien. "We sha'n't do the other act to-night, so the lights'll be put out, and every room in the place is full."

"I can come to yours."

"Yes, I thought of that; but there'll be Laurence, and Ramidge, and Mrs. Baumann, and perhaps others to see. If there was a row I should n't like you to be there."

"Just as you like, Lucien," said Rose unsubmitively.

"I think it best, dear," he replied. "Wait till I get back, Shepherd; I shall come as soon as I can."

Shepherd commended her avoidance of a row.

"My dear Horace, it is n't that. I'm not

fond of rows. I don't like to think Lucien's there by himself. Oh no, I'm not wise! I gave way to please Lucien. Now I'm miserable."

The rehearsal went on, and at the end of the second act a call was announced for the next night. There was not to be a postponement.

Lucien was locking his desk, the theatre was nearly quiet, there had been unpleasant scenes.

He was not used to violent demands for money, to absurd imputations, to wrangling chorus-masters and stage-carpenters. The abrupt withdrawal of Mrs. Baumann, at Laurence's suggestion, had confirmed some suspicions about the money. Laurence, seeing that Mrs. Baumann was distressed, had seen her home, and done his best to reassure her. When he returned, and was asked for money on account by Solano, he cheerfully refused to pay any one anything.

"Nothing due till Friday, when every one will be paid," was all he would say either to threats or entreaties, though he went to the chorus of his own accord, to let them know it was all right, and then came to tell Lucien

not to advance anything. "They 'll come to you for sure," he said. "Refer them to me. Especially Solano. I've seen the girls. They 're all right — a bit scared. Ramidge gave us away beautifully, didn't he? Poor Mrs. Baumann! It's very rough on her. She feels it awfully. Papa Baumann must be a nice kind of animal. Oh, I must see Miss Stanier about her dress. Good-night, Mr. Bewick, there's no need to cheer you up, thank Heaven." He lighted a cigarette, and in a minute Lucien heard him giving directions outside Susan's room about the alterations in Miss Vanlore's dress. She replied with questions. At last Laurence went away. Then the door of the band-room opened, as if some one had been waiting for Laurence to go. There was the sound of many voices, some one came up the stairs and knocked at Lucien's room. It was Shapley. He said the orchestra wanted to have an interview with Mr. Bewick. Lucien went down, and had a chat with them. They appealed to him as one of themselves to guarantee their salaries. He declined. Then there was a general discussion, and threatened secessions. It was a strange scene.

The dim light, the crowded room, the musicians packing their instruments, lighting pipes, and talking in different languages. A pulpy German declared that the whole thing was a fraud, every one concerned swindlers. Lucien demanded an apology; he felt like flying at the man, but that sort of thing would only complete the vulgarity of the affair. He found that a threat was enough to bring the German to his senses. Then he returned to his own room.

This vulgar squabble, following the interrupted rehearsal, came upon a man whose nerves were already near their breaking strain. A little thing will upset a man in that state. It was not Mrs. Baumann's retirement, nor the subsequent interview, that unnerved him. In themselves and ordinarily they would not have affected Lucien. But coming when his wearing passion had weakened his self-control, they left him at the mercy of events. Whether Miss Vanlore succeeded or not was a small matter to Lucien. Laurence had prophesied that the show would go smoothly enough, and the result proved that he was right. Lucien was not thinking of the first night. At this

moment he thought of one thing only, to see Susan, to speak to her of his love, to win her by force of feeling, by the rushing words that crowded his brain! He could hear himself saying them, could see Susan surprised, angry, and then, as her mood changed, he saw the hard lines soften, saw her eyes kindly at last, and heard her speak an unknown tongue.

With some trouble he had braced himself sufficiently to set his room in order, to lock up his desk, and put the score away, doing each thing with the exactitude of a somnambulist.

He was directing a letter when he heard a faint knock at the door, and Susan entered. "See me to the station, Luce," she said, "I'm going by train."

She walked towards him, and stopped between the desk and the window. She was looking a little pale, he thought, or perhaps it was the effect of a gas-jet on her glowing hair. She didn't say anything, and Lucien hurried on with his writing, and directed the envelope to Bayswater instead of Brixton.

It was only about copying music, and really didn't matter. He thought of leaving

it over, but had written another envelope before he decided.

Susan was very silent and still. At least Lucien felt she was. There was no reason why she should speak or move. He wondered how she was looking while he wrote the address. The room was small and close and dark, except for the burner over Susan's head. Lucien had a sense of something going on, something at work, something about to happen. The room was oppressive with a strange oppression. He was writing very slowly, and had to be very careful not to put a wrong name.

The silence was irritating beyond measure; it made the burning of the gas audible, and the voices in the street distinct. He felt it curious to have a silent, unmoving person just near him, watching him, perhaps. At last he finished, and looked up at Susan.

She was standing in profile to him, her eyelids lowered, her head drooping, and the curve of her neck apparent. She breathed in long slow movement, her breast rose and fell perceptibly, her form seemed fluid.

Lucien went to her as one that is called. He had a glimpse of her eyes through short

lashes. Then he had his arm round her, and had kissed the willing lips again and again, then she slipped away.

"Lucien, you said only one," she cried smiling, with cheeks no longer pale, but she would not stay — indeed she seemed hurried.

"I heard you in the band-room," she said, as they turned into the street. "Then I saw you come out, and you looked so disgusted, so contemptuous — is that right? — that I thought I would come to see you before I went. I meant to ride; see, I have no hat, only this lace thing."

They got out of the slum, and passed the quiet streets with the last century houses. Lucien felt his spirits rise to rapture. He had no sense of things external; he had shed the outer world. His work, his art, and his wife slipped into nothingness. Only around and above and below was there a glory incomprehensible. Susan was talking; he could see her lips move through the veil; what she said he partly heard. This ecstasy had never come to him before; this sharp enhancing joy he had never tasted. It swept him to strange and dazzling realms. He

touched the origins of life, and the issues of death were plain to him.

"You are not listening, Luce," said Susan, looking up to him. She seemed short with the veil instead of a hat. Lucien looked on the friendly green eyes, tender now, loving, he thought.

"Go on, dear; I was thinking of you. I want to thank you, but that seems so impossible. Susan, how good you are to me!"

"Lucien, it wasn't an impulse. I had thought it over before — before to-night; and then, when the row came, I thought of you, and again, when you went into the band-room, and I heard the door shut and the men begin to talk."

"Susan, say you love me."

"No, I won't. I don't love you."

Lucien laughed, looking at her smiling face.

"Have it your own way," he said.

They walked on and on, up and down unfamiliar streets, till they suddenly came out in the broad road near the Gardens. At first Susan would not come in.

"Why not, though?" she asked consenting.

Lucien was putting the key in the inner door. She stayed his hand, and lifted up her face to be kissed.

"How about the only one, Luce?" She laughed as they entered, and Rose came out eagerly.

"It's you, Lucien? And Susan! Come in, dear," she said, as she kissed her.

CHAPTER VI

THE first night had come and gone, and the piece had some success, for which Ramidge and Shapley got the credit. Lucien and Mrs. Baumann were charged with lack of knowledge of the stage. One critic said that after Lucien's music the higher mathematics were a recreation. Miss Vanlore made a great hit, and the low comedian's topical gags delighted a public which finds in incongruity the most intelligible humour. Miss Stanier was complimented on her appearance and attitudes, and if the musical critics said she couldn't sing, the dramatic critics redressed the balance by saying she couldn't act. Susan said she was better-looking than some ladies whose names she did not suppress, and that the critics were beasts.

Lucien was quite indifferent. His music had been well rendered, and that satisfied him. The success that Rose and he had

built so much upon was nothing to him now.

Rose had two opinions. The opinion of the partisan or wife, who vehemently declared Lucien's right to a success as if it were one of the privileges secured by Magna Charta, and the opinion of the fine expert, who saw and knew exactly what was wanting in the composer's work.

"It's a little too good for human nature's daily food," she said to Shepherd, who judged dogmatically of music without knowing a note. He learned it in bulk by hearing a great deal, and was oddly right and wrong in his judgments.

"Lucien's music seems to come from a great distance," he said. "It's the sort of thing we should like, if we were only good enough."

"I did n't mean that it was cold or formal," she replied, as her husband came in. "We're cutting you up, dear."

"Don't overdo it, or I sha'n't be able to put myself together again, and then you'll get no more work out of me," said Lucien. "Go on, Rose, she does know, Shepherd, really she does."

He was singularly open to suggestion now,

he let Rose alter and transpose as she liked, and admitted improvement. His artistic sensitiveness was dead, and his professional ambition extinct. He had allowed Fleetwood Lloyd to go to Kersanton, and let Rose think it unavoidable. He had begun to deceive her. Since the dress-rehearsal he had lived in a glowing stupor, where everything but that walk and those kisses were unreal. He had nailed his rudder, so that he could take only one course. His work he got through resolutely, and treated Rose and his friends as he remembered he used to. He contrived to see Susan at least once every day, he had understudy rehearsals especially to meet her; he agreed to a preposterous country tour, just to get the pretext of superintending rehearsals; he changed his luncheon hour as it suited her; he came or left late or early just as it enabled them to meet.

As often as Susan thought safe he came to the Lenæum, and saw her home in the bright, rubber-tired hansoms she was so fond of. But she was cautious — very cautious. She would not go to the Gardens too often, not much more than she did before. Usually she came with a pretext or flower. She was care-

ful to arrange when to avow a meeting, if they had been seen together by any one likely to see Rose. "Never be told of, Luce."

They had marvellous luck, though they went about tremendously. If by chance Susan met a friend she always introduced "Mr. Bewick, the composer of our opera," emphasising the business quality. She was full of resource. She got furious when she found he had carried a letter addressed to her about with him all day.

"Suppose you'd had an accident and that had been found. No, I'll keep it now," she declared.

She wrote many little letters, with "Yours always, S. S." at the bottom. She conciliated Sharpe. She did not sign telegrams, and the office of origin was not in St. John's Wood. She had studied the "Postal Guide" ("to help papa") to some advantage. She was proud of these accomplishments, and Lucien, if he did not admire them, at all events did not condemn. But he never quite got used to Susan's treatment of Rose.

When Susan, with his last letter in her bosom, embraced his wife, he shuddered. It was n't clever to deceive the unsuspecting,

and though he was doing it silently, yet the spectacle revolted. Just for a moment he thought of remonstrating with Susan, but the next moment the unimportance of every one else was as strong as ever. It had been like that with him since the day Susan came to his office. At times he had a dull consciousness that he was doing a shameful thing. These faint reproaches came from a dreamland of fantastic ideas, which had no more relation to life than the fairy tales of childhood. Lucien's condition is met by the moralists with recipes sovereign for those who have not the complaint — some day doctors will study it; at present only poets understand what *Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée* really means.

If he could not shake free before he could not now, when Susan had become caressing. She let him kiss her, but preferred to run her hand through his hair to put it straight, she said, and then her fingers would trickle down his face like scented air, while she laughed and called him darling Luce. She had a way of saying "dear" unconsciously, as if it expressed an habitual thought, which was sweeter than deliberate affection. Yet

throughout it all Susan never told her love. Lucien could not get her to say she loved him. She shrank from the words as if they would bind her.

“Judge me by my actions; aren’t they enough?” she said one evening, as their hansom turned into the Wellington Road, and she lifted her face to be kissed. “Not what I say, but what I do.”

She had dropped nearly all pretence with him, not quite all, but as much as she could. She asked him to correct her language, to tell her the right books to read, the origin of the scrap-knowledge she had picked up. She was curious about the customs of respectable people. She had a great opinion of respectability as a ruling force, and a horror of being subjected to it. She took the temperament of Catherine of Russia into suburban drawing-rooms. She prided herself, and amused Lucien, by a manner which every one who did not know her described as natural.

She was the equilibrium of opposite tendencies. The result was nothing. Her inclinations were checked by her caution, her calculations were neutralised by her impulses. This character came out in her art. She

could actually do nothing, whether it were acting, singing, or composing. A balanced mediocrity, she had not the energy of talent or the patience of industry. In class, station, character, and action, Susan was intermediate. A little lower than the ladies, she topped the chorus. She was of those who look at rich men's tables, and do not sit at them, who make up penultimate fashions in cheaper materials; the class who envy the wealthy, and long for a luxury they have never known, and who do not know why they are ill at ease if they get into a society which they are only superficially fit for.

Lucien knew Susan now, and she did not grate on him as she used to, and he had got down to her; still sometimes she disgusted him. Once when they had contrived a dinner at a restaurant she deliberately thanked him — thanked him as if he had fed her, or given her money's worth. And she thought she had done the right thing.

The time slipped away, the days of the "Captive's Bride" were running out, the dull, hazy weather was breaking at last. The autumn season appeared in the newspapers and drapers' shops.

Horace Shepherd had compensated himself for a rainy holiday by taking a cottage on the rural fringe of London. Two rainless days in one week raised his spirits.

"You must come, Mrs. Bewick. You want a change; Lucien wants a change; we all want a change. Mr. and Mrs. Valance are coming next week. There's plenty of room," he went on eagerly. "We'll arrange the rooms. Here's a plan, a ground plan."

"Clearly, there are no upper rooms," said Rose.

"Oh, yes, there are; but I've no perspective. See that's your room — Lucien can come on the Saturday, you know — the other front one is for the Valances; and I say, Mrs. Bewick, could I ask Miss Stanier? She wants a change badly."

"Looking pale, is she?"

"Awfully! Never saw a girl look so bad. I met her in Regent Street the other day," said Shepherd, saying nothing about Lucien.

"I should think she'd like to go, Horace. It's very kind of you to think of her."

"What I mean to say is, can I ask her? Would her people think the Valances enough? They ought not to know them, ought they?"

There was a pause. "I think they ought," said Rose.

"You know her people?"

Rose bowed.

"Mrs. Bewick, would you ask them. Would you mind? It would be immensely good of you?"

"Why didn't you say so before?"

"These things are so much better when they're spontaneous," he replied, laughing. "You might write and say ——"

"My dear Horace!"

"I beg your pardon. Of course you know what to say; but I thought ——"

"Thanks; that's enough. You'll never be loved for your manners, Horace, but you've a beautiful heart," said Rose. "I'll arrange about Miss Stanier, and let you know."

"Could n't Lucien get a day or two off?" suggested Shepherd. "He's looking rather Londony."

"He's been away a good deal already — about the play; he has rehearsals still," said Rose. "I think he's worried about the Kersanton business."

"Is n't he going?"

"Fleetwood Lloyd's going. Isn't it a

shame, Horace? All the designs are Lucien's. Lloyd has talked Mr. Philipson over. The old gentleman's rather afraid of Lloyd, I think," said Rose. "And he's been ill you know. Fleetwood is studying the periods now. Count de Froncemagne knows more architecture than Lloyd — a great deal more. Fleetwood's very good for getting business and going about talking; but as for architecture — well, that's different, isn't it?"

Shepherd had to go before Rose had tired of showing that there was only one English architect who could carry out Count de Froncemagne's glorious idea of restoring the Abbaye de Kersanton to the state it was in before the Revolution.

"Think, Horace; an eleventh century church added to in every style up to 1643! A rival of the Creizker! We made a tour in Brittany the year after we were married. The Count's place, with the remains of the Abbey, is near St. Pol de Léon and Morlaix — dreamy places both. It's like living in The Earthly Paradise! And we did our churches well. That's where an architect husband has the best of a soldier!"

"Soldier first, then?"

"Soldier second always. Actual Lucien first," said Rose. "Good-bye, Horace. I'll let you know about Miss Stanier. Oh, perhaps she'd like to bring Dugald Miller!"

"Who is he? She never mentions him."

"Those are the dangerous ones," said Rose. "He's a nice boy — a great friend of Susan's, with a passion for agricultural chemistry. I told you of him."

"Unnatural youth."

"Oh, it's intellectual, and not exclusive," she went on. "I think Mr. Stanier had some business with young Miller's people. They make chemicals up in the Lakes, Susan says."

"Runcorn, more likely."

"Well, yes, really it is something Lancashire or Cheshire," replied Rose, "Susan idealises. She likes things to be pretty, and looks at them through a haze of sentiment."

"Or the fumes of chemicals," replied Shepherd. "I don't think we'll trouble the passionate chemist, Mrs. Bewick, thank you all the same."

"As you like, Horace. So if Susan is going for her usual day with Dugald at Welbridge, she can't come with us, if you don't

care about her coming. You see Mr. Miller's at an agricultural college at Welbridge; Mr. Stanier has something to do with a derelict factory there, and either he or Sylvain take Susan down if they're going while term's on."

"They usually do go."

"Yes, it's got to be a custom, Susan says. Welbridge is the loveliest English village she ever saw."

"Fumes again," replied Shepherd. "Well, I must go, really. Get Miss Stanier alone if possible, if not *à la chimiste*, though I fear him, these learning boys are so ready to teach us what we have forgotten."

"Chemistry, Horace?"

"Compulsory for London matric, you know. Good-bye for good this time, Rose."

In the end Susan accepted without mentioning Mr. Miller; Laurence obligingly had a *matinée* only on that Saturday, but Lucien quite unexpectedly had to take a great musical authority to see this opera, so he arranged with Susan to dine together, and go to Shepherd's place by an evening train.

They were a little late at the station, but were fortunate enough to get a carriage to

themselves, and indeed, might have had the door locked, had not Susan objected. A few moments before the time of starting two ladies and two children got in.

"We'd better have had the door locked," whispered Lucien.

"I don't travel in locked carriages," replied Susan.

The train started with a jerk. A child fell between Lucien's legs. He restored it to the woman, who put it by her side without interrupting what she was saying about the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, dilapidations, and Walter. She reported verbatim. Lucien met Susan's glance. She was stifling laughter. He looked away to prevent himself laughing outright. He tried to guess from their appearance where the ladies would get out. A rural suburb seemed most likely. At Greystoke he had almost taken leave of them. They didn't move. They were blind to their own interests. Greystoke appeals to cultured people of rural tastes. There's an English village green, a Christmas card church, and an ivy clad hostelry. Many people would have got out at once. Lucien began to despise them. Under pretext of

explaining a drawing in *The Architect*, he asked Susan to guess where they would get out. She told him not to speak so loudly, and snatched the paper away so naturally, that the ladies were sure they had been married a twelvemonth.

Then the girl-child went to the further window, was told to come back, and didn't take the slightest notice, but turned and stared at Lucien as if asking his opinion. Then an up-express rattled past, and the girl nearly lost her hat. The threat of being reported to "your uncle" brought her back. She scrambled on to the seat, knelt by the boy, whispered laboriously into his ear, and looked at Susan. He looked at Susan, and said "Raver," and laughed. Then they both laughed. Susan said "little beasts" under her breath, and looked sympathetically at Lucien. The intruders lost another chance at Lower Park. Not even a new church dwarfing its tin predecessor could tempt them, nor a large common so nice for children. Lucien could not keep himself from following their conversation. He got to know a lot about the family, but as time went on — the time of his journey with Susan — they

exhausted the personal topics and took a wider range, alighting on a current law case. At first it was confused with two others, then the reasons of it being tried in the country bothered them. They agreed that it was due to the personal intervention of the sovereign. Next they expounded the case under mutual correction — so that it sounded like an irregular litany. They used plaintiff and defendant interchangeably, puzzling Lucien, who could not help getting interested. Suddenly he remembered that a railway carriage is the place to study human nature. But that he had arranged for. Five-and-twenty minutes out of fifty-two had gone. He looked at Susan. She was studying the advertisements in *The Architect*. Against the darkness of night her profile stood out softly. Opposite the children slept and the ladies babbled.

At last they moved, collecting things, and sat in silent expectancy, as if about to testify for their faith's sake. They were nearing their station. As the train stopped, a youth rushed to the window.

“Oh, Aunt Helen, mother says, will you go on to Hurlford, her next station — her carriage had to call there. I don't know

what for, something for to-morrow's dinner, I suppose. Good-bye, aunt, I'm going back on my bicycle."

That was more than enough for Susan. She passed *The Architect* to Lucien, pointing to an advertisement, and yielded herself to rocking reddening laughter. The good ladies stared. Lucien's need was for language, bad language. He read the advertisement grimly, intently, till they got to Hurlford, where at last the ladies got out. Then he swore carefully.

"Lucien, why did n't you laugh?" exclaimed Susan. "They'll think I'm an idiot; and don't use such awful language. You surprise me. Gentlemen don't swear before ladies."

"Really, I beg your pardon; but it was irresistible."

"But why? Why were you in such a rage?"

"Don't you know, Susan?"

"No, I don't; and if you'd calculated on having a carriage to ourselves, you deserve to be disappointed."

"Well, I was — that's certain."

"I'm very glad of it. Really, Lucien, I don't understand you. You behave as if I

belonged to you, and I don't, and never shall. Think of your wife !”

Lucien's assumption of what Susan called proprietorial airs always upset her finely-balanced temper.

“ I wanted to look at that waltz of yours,” he replied.

“ I did n't bring it. I knew you'd only laugh at it,” said Susan, as they stopped at Orkley.

“ You promised, Susan ; you promised,” he replied, trying to persuade himself that they did not change here. “ I thought your word was sacred — I believed you.”

“ One does n't always keep a silly promise,” she returned. “ Besides I am not responsible to you.”

“ Yes, you are responsible to me. You made the promise to me,” said Lucien, hoping for the guard's whistle.

“ I am not a bit more responsible to you than to any one else,” she cried. She had the trick of treating her relations with Lucien as if they could be, and not be, at the same time. It is the argumentative form of eating your cake and having it — an illicit process dear to women.

"As you like. We won't discuss the matter any more then," said Lucien with a smile.

"I suppose you think it is n't ladylike to break one's word," she continued, announcing a principle she professed to live up to.

The whistle sounded, and the train slowly started. Lucien leant back.

"Theoretically it is not," he said.

Susan sat silent in dignity for some minutes. Lucien stretched his long form on the seat opposite and closed his eyes.

"I don't know another man who'd look a gentleman in that attitude," thought Susan, feasting on Lucien's fair manliness.

When he looked up she was smiling. "I never knew a man who annoyed me as you do. Why do you do it?"

"Morton! Morton Station," shouted a porter as the train drew up.

"Exeter, sir?" asked a ticket-collector.

"Exeter! no," exclaimed Lucien, jumping up.

"We're for Southbourne."

"Cross bridge, middle platform, second train, change at Orkley," said the man. "All for Exeter, Bideford, and" — apparently the

rest of England — for as he swam down the glittering darkness of the platform he seemed to disgorge an endless gazetteer.

Lucien had their bags out just in time.

“They didn’t tell us to change,” said Susan, as they crossed the bridge. “They didn’t call out at Orkley, I’m sure.”

“It’s a happy-go-lucky line,” said Lucien.

“Oh, that’s all very well; but how should I have looked on Exeter platform at midnight with you and a dressing-bag?”

“Charming.”

Susan laughed. She had never mastered her sense of humour, and she was never more charming than when she yielded to it more readily than most ladies.

They had to wait twenty minutes for the train back to Orkley, and would have to wait forty minutes there.

“That’ll be a nice time to turn up at a strange house,” she exclaimed.

“It’s easily explained.”

“And get the credit of doing it on purpose! Oh no, Lucien. I left the key of my bag behind; only found it out as we got to the station, &c. We came by this next train. See?”

Susan's voice sounded uncertain, her look at Lucien was anxious.

"If you think it best," he assented, "I ought to have looked out."

"It wasn't your fault, Luce; it's the damned railway."

She fretted a little, but soon accepted the accomplished fact like a man, and she did n't blame Lucien.

At Orkley a zealous porter advised them to take their seats at once.

"It's the last local, and fills up long before the London train gets here, especially on Saturdays," he said, locking the door without protest from Susan.

Indeed, Susan seemed to have changed all at once, or rather to have become herself; perhaps with her swift deliberation she had determined to take all the situation offered. Lucien had never seen her so frank, so charming, so unaffected. All else had gone from her. At such moments Susan's nature came out, untrammelled, unchecked. It ravished like mountain air or early morning. Lucien felt her charm. She transported him. She talked very quickly in high notes; her eyes shone all pupil, and her face glowed

pale. She let him kiss her as he had never kissed her before, because she returned it. The station was silent, the blinds drawn. Susan's transfigured face, white in the dimness, stirred Lucien to a passionate declaration — a declaration recorded in the panting breath, the rioting heart of the woman whose face was against his, whose form was in his clasp, whose strange voice had all the phrases of love. And so they stayed as if they would never part.

At the sound of feet Susan released herself, quite calmly, as women do, having no shame with the beloved. She looked at herself in a hand-glass and smiled happy love at Lucien; she brushed her hair, leaving her dressing-bag wide open; then she sprayed herself with *peau d'Espagne*, and was going to douche Lucien, when she changed her mind and drenched the cushion opposite instead.

"Forgot! My scent, you know. More Machiavelli, as you call it," she said, returning the bottle to her bag, which she shut. "Really, there's too much of my lady's chamber about this carriage. Don't smile enigmatically, Luce; I hate it. I imagine

you're thinking the wrong things," she continued, in the thick tones that come of hat pins in the mouth. "Is that straight?"

"You look better without the veil. You'll be turning it up and cutting your face in two."

"How do you know? Why should I? You're the most fastidious man I ever met. Tie it, Lucien." Then she sat down and began putting on a pair of arrival gloves.

"Tell me about Mrs. Valance, Luce. British matron, is n't she? Servants, babies, and dress, and would like to know really whether the stage is as immoral as people say — that's the style, is n't it?"

"I think it does n't matter what you talk about as long as you do talk. She's a nice woman."

"All your women are nice, and all your men a good sort. You've a wonderful lot of friends," she replied. "And Mrs. Valance — good sort, I suppose? Luce, I do keep my word; I did bring my waltz."

"May I see it?"

"You won't laugh? I know you will, or you'll laugh to yourself. You're so critical."

"Am I likely to annoy you on purpose?"

"You do it often enough, intentionally or not."

"My dear Susan, you're not thin-skinned. Let me look at your composition. I want to see Susette expressed in music."

Susan took a roll of music-paper from her bag. She read it over to herself first.

"Listen, Lucien, this is how it goes: La, la, la, la — la, la, la, la," she hummed. "That's the opening." She stopped, expecting approval.

"Don't stop. Go right on; then I can judge."

"You don't like it; I can see you don't. I sha'n't finish it."

Lucien laughed. "I did n't think you would be afraid of me," he said.

"I'm not. Listen; this is the next thing — I don't know the technical name — La, la, la, la — la, la, la, lah — la, la, lah," she hummed, marking the time with her hand. "The refrain comes in here," she said, gliding into a new rhythm.

"Keep on, Susan; I want the whole effect," said Lucien, closing his eyes on a vision of Susan frowning at the score and gracefully beating the wrong time. "It can't last much

longer," he thought; "then what am I to say? This comes of saying she could compose. Ah, that false relation again; now the street organ lilt. That's it! Now the reminiscences; just what I expected. Oh, that's too bad! Has she ever been taught? What shall I say?"

"I was going to make it longer," said Susan, "but I got tired of it."

"Tell me, dear, is that the first thing you wrote?"

"Yes. I began a Reverie afterward. I knew exactly the feeling — dreamy, sad with a lot of regret — that I wanted to put in, but it all went away when I began to write."

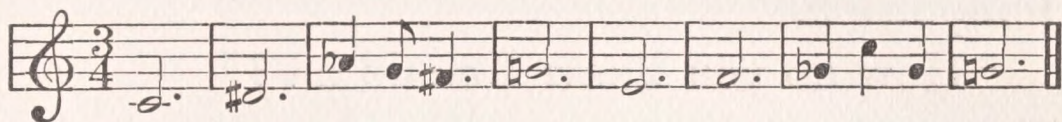
"How long is it since you wrote the waltz?"

"A long while ago — a year. Oh, more than that. I tried to write and got disgusted, and put it away, and took it up again; and this is as far as I've got."

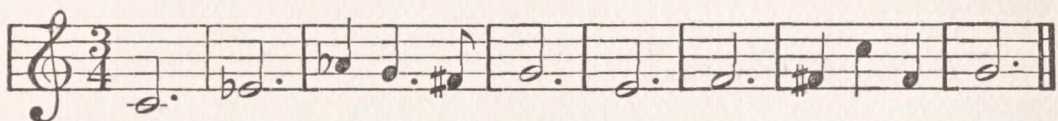
He could not tell her that the fragment was a mass of elementary faults, that it showed an unmusical temperament, that it reflected the banalities of the popular taste.

"You've begun like any one else. We all have the same faults. One moment," he

said, taking the piece. "See, here you wrote —



"This is what you meant —



"I don't want it corrected like a school-girl's exercise," she cried, snatching it away. "It's just like you to notice the technical part. The idea's the important thing."

"Oh, you don't want ideas, Susan."

“ Oh, don't I! nor do I want a lesson in the rudiments of music. I was an idiot to show it to you,” she said, putting the music back.

They were disturbed by the arrival of the down train. Their door was unlocked, and the carriage filled. At Southbourne their bags were taken by Shepherd's man.

"I'll go over that waltz for you, Susan, if you like," said Lucien.

"You're as patient as a saint," she replied, slipping her arm through his.

“ Saint Antony ? ”

She looked up colouring, and laughing.

"No, not Saint Antony. He resisted temptation."

"How do you know I could n't?"

"Well, I do know. Is that the house, Luce? Remember our plot; we are collaborators."

"Accomplices."

"Put it prettily if you can," she replied.

It was lovely to see Susan. She told the story of her forgetfulness admirably. She gushed at first, depicting her fright and desperate resolve to drive both ways. She honestly regretted the expense, threw in some of her reflections *en route*, and described her descent on her unsuspecting family with dramatic force and graceful gesture. She appealed to every one in turn for approval at some point in the story. She exhibited in its naked barbarity Lucien's proposal to force the locks open with a chisel, "cold, I think. That's what he suggested, Rose. 'I'll get one at the station,' he said. I saw both locks of my beautiful bag torn open, and the secrets of the toilet exposed on the platform."

She was telling her story while she leant

an elbow on the mantelpiece. She had insensibly taken the centre of the room, and spoke better for having the others all watching her.

"We did it quick. Lucien secured the driver by appealing to his lowest qualities."

"Drink," said Shepherd.

"Greed," said Valance.

"Free admissions," said Susan. "That man drove. When I got back to the station no Mr. Bewick, not even a second-hand one. An old porter — he looked like what the Zoo people call the white-ruffed lemur — casually asked me if I was the party going with a gentleman to Southbourne. 'Come along with me; no luggage, I suppose! I've got you a carriage,' he said. Then, as we were going, he went on, 'He did knock you off well, miss — knew yer by heart. If there's been one young lady going with a gentleman to Southbourne to-night, there's been a score; but you're the first that made my heart jump. 'That's her,' I said, and you was.'"

Lucien laughed at the way she worked up old material.

"Lucien," she went on, "had reserved a whole carriage."

"Thoughtful of him," said Shepherd.

"The porter went on — 'Now I'll go and tell the gentleman' ['he used the word offensively — made me feel as if I wasn't a lady," interpolated Susan]; 'he said he'd be reading the papers in the hotel smoking-room.' Appearance of Bewick Esquire! 'Done it under time,' he said, and that was all the praise I got."

"We will praise you," said Shepherd, as Susan slid to the ground at Rose's feet.

"We've had a good time," exclaimed Valance. "Mrs. Bewick has played us the whole of your opera. I like it better without the singers."

"They do intercept the music," said Lucien.

"We're going to start early to-morrow," Shepherd announced. "We drive through the woods to Prior's Mount, picnic and exploration, then tea, and home along the hills, and may we be blessed with fine weather."

So they were blessed. After a drive through miles of great beeches they struck the pine belt, where the wheels ran softly on layers of brown needles. A winding

course up the hill gave glimpses of deep combes and the sunlit flanks of curving downs, and sudden plunges into darkness and dazzling returns to daylight, till they stopped at the plateau near the summit.

"This is luxury," said Valance, pointing to a table with seats round it. "How comes it, Shepherd?"

"The family use it, I think," said Shepherd. "Was n't it a bit of luck getting leave to come? They're awfully particular."

"Thank you, Mr. Shepherd," cried Mrs. Valance.

They were fluent in admiration, all except Rose. She was standing apart, at the edge where the plateau faces the dying slopes, which melt into the throbbing silver haze in the far distance. If any one had noticed — no one did — he would have seen her first eager look soften, fade, and disappear till she became motionless as the trees, till she seemed to blend with the air, the wind, and the sun, as if she had been called by Nature to come back to her.

"Lucien," she whispered, and turned as if he had been by her.

They were laying the cloth, or more accu-

rately, the gatekeeper's wife, obstructed by Susan and directed by Mrs. Valance, was trying to do so. The men were breaking open things, wooden and tin. The wood resounded with zealous industry. Rose looked again where the glory had been, and then went to help the woman. Intuitively she gave Susan something that employed the hands and left the mind free.

"Break up the lettuce, will you, dear? I'll do this," she said, bringing a welcome experience to the woman's aid. Very soon Shepherd and Valance thought they were helping Susan to make the salad. Salad-making is a fine opening for any competent lady. It's "Take those, Mr. Shepherd;" "The whole cruet, Mr. Valance;" "I don't want the outsides;" "Would you draw my sleeve a little higher, please;" "A cloth for my hands, they're wringing," and so they were; and the rest of the lunch was ready and waiting.

The gatekeeper's wife, Mrs. Simnet — the name must be revealed — hearing a discussion as to coffee-making in England and France, championed her own country, and modestly asserted her skill.

"Give me as much stuff and their contrivances, and I'd give you as good a cup of coffee as any Frenchman."

Mr. Valance, usually inactive, sprang up and found a tin of coffee. Mrs. Simnet saw the trap, but stuck to her word, and black coffee, though extra, was provided. They talked, and smoked, and slept in due course.

"Mrs. Bewick, will you sing to us?" asked Shepherd. "Mrs. Valance has brought her guitar."

Rose preferred to accompany herself. With the guitar slung across her, she stood up and began a *chansonnette*, light as summer cloud, bright as summer sky. It was the first of many. For long the music vibrated in that wood, and for long the sweet human contralto sent forth the warm notes, colouring thoughts and hopes with hues from dream-land.

"Does n't she look beautiful?" whispered Susan to Shepherd.

Lucien heard. Rose was standing bare-headed a little off the tree, her hair wind-teased into spray, her artist hand on the strings, and the blue silk band across her

white dress. She smiled as she saw him look at her, but finished the ballad firmly for all that.

"A musician Mrs. Bewick," said Valance seriously to Lucien. Valance knew, if any one did. From him a "musician" meant a great deal. He met Rose and took the guitar from her, took her hand too, and kissed it gravely.

Susan heard. She declined to sing without music. Valance told them stories of his early days in Paris, where he studied music, and knew Gounod and Bizet.

"Why didn't you keep it up?" asked Susan.

"I lost my voice, so I made a business of my art and became a music publisher," he replied quickly. "Now for the other ruin. A Robertine priory, isn't it?"

"I doubt it," said Lucien.

They went to the ruin, and after that the party separated, and met and lost one another, and found one another. In the end Lucien and Susan came together on the peak above the plateau.

They lay on the grass at the verge. Beyond and around them the hills and woods and

plains glowed in the hot sun, and the sharp fragrance of the pines rose in gusts of incense.

"Where's London, Luce?"

"That core of darkness."

"What can you see in it, Luce?"

"My room at the Lenæum."

"At this distance, Luce?"

"Near or far, I can see it in your eyes now."

"Only one?" she said, dropping her glance steadily into and through his eyes. "Dear Luce," she said, smoothing his cheek with her cool fingers.

"Listen," he said.

Through the pines and the scent of them came climbing up two voices and the strum of a guitar.

"It's Rose and — and Valance. He should not do that. Listen, Susan — a voice lost to Europe. The Faust duet. That's music. There's an artist. Oh, the fresh old air."

They let it come and surround them, and shut them in from all but love and music, and sweep them to realms behind the sailing white clouds.

"How well she sings," gasped Susan, as

plain silence returned. Lucien did not speak.

"How long since we opened?" she asked.

"Five weeks."

"Five weeks and two days," said Susan.

"That's a long while, Luce. Come on, they'll be looking for us."

CHAPTER VII

SCARCELY three weeks had gone, and everything was altered. The "Captive's Bride" was withdrawn, the Lenæum to let, Mrs. Baumann back in private life with her husband, and Susan Stanier understudying at another theatre. The weather had changed also; this time to cold rain, so that the fire in the drawing-room at Wilmot Gardens became a bright necessity. The callers had gone, leaving tea-cups in strange places, and chairs in conversational attitudes. Mrs. Valance stayed as usual to talk people over.

"Very nice people those Alisons," she went on. "You get all the nice people, Rose. You don't dine bores for business. The middle daughter reminded me of — Another visitor, Rose! At this time. The Gilbert Harrisons most likely come to wait for their train."

"How d'ye do, Rose? Oh, you're not looking fit at all! Nothing wrong, I hope?"

I beg your pardon, Mrs. Valance; really, I didn't see you."

It was Ryan back from tour, sunburnt, in high spirits, and eager for news of Lucien's opera. But as Rose said, he knew everything already.

"Oh yes; people in the trade hear trade gossip. I want to hear about you and Lucien, how you liked the theatre, the excitement the first night, and all that sort of thing. Mrs. Valance, you know Camonetti," he said, referring to the head of a rival firm; "well, he declares that the author of the 'Captive's Bride' will write a great opera one day or another. Now, Rose, your impressions! I may?" he asked, taking out his cigarette case. "Close time for visitors. She spoils me still, you see, Mrs. Valance," he said, as he struck a match.

Rose's account delighted Ryan. Throughout it he was a long smile, broken by laughs.

"This is much better than a play," he observed. "After Miss Vanlore?"

"Miss Stanier came next — Ryan's introduction, remember."

"I never advised engaging her," he protested.

"She did n't hurt the piece, though. It is n't what she does, but what she does n't, and ought."

"You remind me, Mr. Legard!" exclaimed Mrs. Valance. "She was lunching at the stores with Lucien yesterday. They did n't see me, and I was in such a hurry, I could n't speak."

"He could n't have seen you, Alice, or he would have told me," said Rose, as coolly as if her heart had not leapt in pain. "Miss Stanier looked charming," she continued, taking care to avoid Ryan's glance, though she knew he would notice her voice.

Ryan had noticed, as he always noticed any variation in Rose, and as she kept up her story, he gave her praise for her brave spirit.

"What's Lucien been doing," he thought, as Rose described her delight at the reception of the opera, her dreams of fame and opulence.

"For one night only," she explained. "In the morning were the papers."

"Judgment, give judgment!" cried Ryan.

"Well, Ryan, I think that it's a mistake to have anything to do with the theatre after

a certain age. You can't get the *optique des coulisses* unless you begin young."

"My case exactly," exclaimed Ryan. "When I first went into the profession, I felt as if I had suddenly been thrown into a dreamland where the Abstract Emotions had human forms. Fear, Pity, Anger, Love, Envy, and the other old friends with capitals, had come to life. It didn't seem decent to associate with emotion so much exposed. It was rather a spectral world; but all the same, it's a fine field for one commencing psychologist."

"Rose laughs, and you laugh, Mr. Legard, and I don't understand a bit why. What was that all about? Your words mean something when they're alone, but when they come together they're not intelligible. I am sorry to see you believe in psychology. I must go now, Rose. Kindest regards to Mr. Bewick. I hope he'll get his spirits back soon. He's quite depressed. It's the reaction, I suppose. Good-bye, Mr. Legard. Come and see me soon, and bring your friend."

"What friend, Mrs. Valance?"

"The interpreter," said the lady, triumphant.

"Mrs. Valance still sees truth whole, and administers it neat," he observed.

"There 's no malice in it."

"Then it 's inexcusable," replied Ryan.
"I 'm sorry Lucien 's out of sorts."

"Oh, it 's nothing serious. Do you think she noticed he had n't told me about the stores and Miss Stanier?" said Rose.

"No! Mrs. Valance always tells you what she notices; then you know she 's observant. Stupid of Luce."

"Stupid of me," replied Rose.

With these two there was so rare a sympathy, so reticent a delicacy, that they spoke lightly when they were most in earnest, and used a screen of stoicism to intercept any intuition too direct.

"I 'm in town for good now," he said.
"At my old rooms. I think I 'll take it back."

Rose unlocked her desk, and gave him a pocket sketch-book of the kind artists use for notes. This had a steel lock to it.

"Mrs. Pearce was here the other day," said Rose, as she wrapt the book in a piece of fresh paper.

"Still at the same place?"

"Yes. Just the same as she was. Only herself and the master. No mistress, no fellow-servant."

"Unsociable, but devoted," said Ryan.

Each knew that the other was thinking of that day more than two years ago, when a woman of strange pallor, and with piercing dark eyes, had roused Rose in early morning, when they were living in the country.

Rose had told Ryan how thoroughly she believed this stranger, who said she was Willie Raynor's servant, that she had come for the dangerous remedy for his attacks — so dangerous was it, that he would not keep it himself, but always left some in Rose's care. Even then, when they had not seen him for so long, he asked her to keep it. Rose had given it to her.

The same evening, after some difficulty, the doctor had certified that Willie Raynor had died from an overdose of that medicine. The doctor had, in compliance with the urgent and very prompt appeal of the family, waived his preference for a *post-mortem*. There the matter ended. The family had returned to the shades they had sprung from so opportunely; the doctor had given himself the

benefit of the doubt that always exists; and the others, the friends, had held their peace.

"She had seen Lucien in the street, and wanted to know who Susan was. There was no mistaking her description," said Rose. "Lucien had n't seen her. He had said nothing about her."

"Mary Pearce turned curious?" he replied, quite understanding that Lucien had said nothing about Miss Stanier either.

"She was quite interested," said Rose, giving him the key of the note-book.

"A strange woman," said Ryan, after a pause. "*Fleur de Luce*, I must go now. May I come soon and talk to you about something pleasant?"

"Of Alice? Then it's good news."

"Possible good news. Conspiracy!"

"Abduction!"

"The criminal code! I'll take my chance one afternoon. We're rehearsing at the Mayfair."

"That's where Susan's engaged."

"Somewhat too much of Susan," he replied. "Good-bye, Rose; and remember, I expect to find you in better health next time."

Ryan came away angry with Lucien, and

prejudiced against Susan. Ryan was probably as humane a man as could be wished for, but his deeper sympathies were restricted to his own class, and to just a few others who ought to have been in that class, who were of it by nature if not by income.

Rose was the chief of these. Ryan admitted to himself that she was of right in his class. Had they been strangers or enemies, he would always have treated her as of the same caste as himself. With Raynor and Lucien there was the link of personal liking only, a link tough enough to bear any strain, but not the same thing as the instinctive acknowledgment that Rose and he were on one level. They looked at things in the same way, they had the same ideals. Add to this that they were friends, and that Ryan would do much for his friends.

Rose was suffering, and she ought not to suffer. He had noticed her voice when Mrs. Valance had told her of seeing Lucien at the stores. It was not the right voice for Rose. Lucien was concealing things from her. That was unlike him, and hateful to Rose. Ryan was not altogether surprised at Lucien. It had always been on the cards that some

woman would enlarge his knowledge of her sex. He would have been very lucky if some woman had not avenged his unconscious indifference to appreciation. Ryan smiled, remembering Lucien's women friends. Lucien thought they were fond of music. He forgot ladies were women. How he must have enraged them! Ryan had glimpses of appreciative women of many styles. None of the style to attract fastidious Lucien. His fastidiousness had stood him in good stead. For music, beauty, and disposition he had the keen fastidiousness which demands perfection. He was as sensitive to the dissonances of beauty and character as to those of tone. But once fixed, his imagination threw splendours on the object. Ryan had known him do it about voices, and music, and his own profession. He did not care to think of that glowing faculty at work on a woman. Ryan hated to interfere in such matters, yet he knew that he would act for Rose if there were need.

"Another of them," he thought, as he took out the meagre record of Willie Raynor's life.

That a woman had to answer for his ruin,

Ryan never had any doubt. For some woman Raynor had broken with the girl he was plighted to; for some woman he had sacrificed his friendship with Lucien, who had resented his disloyalty — resented it with a scorn peculiar to the man who is sensitive and inexperienced. They make no allowances. Ryan's training had been different. It had made him lenient — weakly indulgent. Rose would call him when his condemnation lagged behind her indignation. This temper had its bounds. Ryan could give a verdict — more, he could carry it out.

He turned over the book, looked at the writing, running through rough drawings of heads, scenes, figures, bits of character, studies in pose and attitude. He had rarely seen Willie during that time. Touring kept him away a good deal; and Willie's constraint when they did meet, checked all confidences. Ryan had read these notes, as Mrs. Pearce told him "the master" wanted him to read them. He had not studied them, nor tried to find out his friend's secret. It was a secret well kept. Not a name of place or person, not a date nor an indication of season, to guide the inquisitive, except towards

the end, where the self-control, or the attention, had slackened.

One thing could not be missed — the symbol of Venus, used for the woman's name, as if she represented Love itself.

Out of the unconnected sentences, convincingly sincere, rose a woman, elusive, various, provoking. Whether young or old, maid or married, dark or fair, was not told. It was the nature, the spirit, that the student of form had preserved. Ryan shut the book in repulsion.

He had not to search for Lucien. As he expected, Lucien was at the Mayfair a day or two afterwards. He and Susan came to the stage-door as Ryan was leaving.

"Mr. Legard, my friend Mr. Bewick," said Susan.

"Well, Ryan."

"Well, Luce."

"Oh, if you're going to slobber over one another like that, I'll go," cried Susan, making for the letter-rack.

"Sorry I missed you the other day," said Lucien.

"Bound to meet now you're one of us," replied the other. "Rose all right again?"

"Rose! She's not been ill!"

"Was n't looking quite the thing, I thought. Glad you did so well, Lucien, with your piece. The management drop much?"

"Nothing to hurt. I sha'n't do any more theatrical work."

"Cold fit, eh? You will, you know, and you'll do better."

"Where are you men going to lunch?" said Susan.

"With you, if we're asked."

"Right. You shall be my hosts," said Susan. "Let's go to Giuseppe Joe's; he's got the place himself now."

At the top of the street they met Horace Shepherd, and included him among the hosts.

It was just the thing Susan liked, this lunch with three men, no other woman, and a restaurant where she felt at home, and feared no crushing toilettes. Giuseppe Joe received her with profound respect, bowed to each of the gentlemen, gave them the best table, and put a special waiter at their disposal. He took Susan's jacket, gloves, veil, and parasol, as if each article endowed him

with a separate order of chivalry. He presented the *menu* as if it were a nation's thanks for a province added to the empire. He regretted Susan's absence, had seen her likeness in *Footlight Flashes*, and called Lucien, Maestro.

"I can get you tickets for the Private View, Miss Stanier," said Shepherd, "if you are not likely to be acting on Saturday."

"Thanks, so much. There's no fear of that. The parts are too good. Oh, it's hard to be an understudy; your ladies live by rule, and your manager says you've more leisure for the pleasures of polyandry."

"You resented that?" asked Ryan.

"No, I didn't know what he meant," replied Susan. "Never resent unless you know. I once gave myself away awfully by resenting something quite innocent. So I said nothing, and laughed meaninglessly. What was Sumner driving at?"

"He was making a hash of Bathurst's epigram, 'When Polyandry got into society she took the name of Flirtation,'" said Ryan.

"I'm no nearer," said Susan. "This must be faced! Horace, what does polyandry mean?"

"Well, you know, when there are more men than women. No, that's not it. When the increase of population exceeds —"

"That way lies Malthus," said Lucien.

"Well, Luce, you tell me," said Susan.

"Bewick on the Matriarchate!" murmured Ryan.

"You know what polygamy is," said Lucien.

"I've heard, and I don't approve of it," said Susan.

"Oh, Miss Stanier, you ought not to give your opinion; you must only answer the question," said Shepherd professionally.

"I'm not under cross-examination, Mr. Shepherd," said Susan; "so I say polygamy ought not to be allowed. What would you men say if it was the other way round?"

"Polyandry," said Ryan.

"Let us change the subject gracefully," said Shepherd.

"Transitions show the artist," said Lucien.

"Let us talk of dress," said Ryan. "That's a half-way house."

"Miss Stanforth's scarlet in the ball-room scene," said Shepherd.

"Half-way — barely," said Susan.

"We need n't go any farther into that subject," said Ryan. "Quick-change artists in demand this morning. Have some whiskey, Miss Stanier; it'll help you to bear the strain."

"I've given up whiskey a long while," said Susan.

"The best plan if you can do it," said Ryan.

"Not because I took such a lot," cried Susan. "Quite another reason."

"Peut-on?" asked Lucien.

"On ne peut pas," said Ryan, after looking at Susan. "Elle s'attendrit — affaire de cœur dans le lointain. Parlons d'autre chose."

"Ordre du jour. Voulez-vous que je parle de Mlle. Yvette, par exemple."

"N'importe, regardez-donc. Le nuage s'envole, le front est serein, le regard est hardi. Suzette revient à ses dernières amours!"

"Do you always speak French when you don't want to be understood, Mr. Legard?" said Susan.

"Why else?"

Lucien and Shepherd had to get back to

work, so the lunch party broke up, ushered out by Giuseppe Joe deprecating their praise.

"We 'll drop Lucien at the office," said Susan. "You 'll be going my way, Mr. Legard? We can go together if you 'll carry my parcels."

"Delighted to walk with you. I 'll engage a commissionaire for the parcels. I never carry parcels."

"Well, Luce will carry them to the office," said Susan; "so never mind about the commissionaire."

They walked along the Embankment, Susan and Ryan talking all the time, Lucien silent and absorbed. At the office she went to his room for some music he had promised her.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"Oh, soon; some day or other."

"Will you come to tea after the matinée?"

"I 'm going to the Private View."

"Would you like to go to that concert on Friday?"

"No; I 'm going to a theatre with Dugald Miller. You know he comes up on Friday."

"As you like."

"As I like, of course," she replied.

"Have n't I told you I can't be going all over

London with you now? The slack season's over. People are coming back. You make me wild with you, Lucien. Good-bye. Buck up, Luce," she said, with her ready smile, as she ran off to Ryan.

"Got your cigars?" she asked, as they set off. "Well, Mr. Legard, what luck in America? Did they like you?"

"Oh yes. They made some fuss about me. I had a good time there. You know there are a lot of English actors there. Mackinnon and Hackett. I saw your friend Butler Carstairs."

"Butler Carstairs? He's in Australia."

"He was at 'Frisco when I was there. He asked after you."

"Carstairs asked after me?" said Susan slowly. "Why should he? I was only in the theatre with him a few weeks."

"He inquired about nearly every one. Sign of home-sickness, I think."

"Do you know Dugald Miller?" she asked abruptly. "A great friend of mine. Very clever — scientific, you know. Quite young; just as dark as you're fair. I should like you to know him. I'm going to take him to Mrs. Bewick's on Friday. Will you be there?"

"It isn't her day, you know; but I dare say she'll let me come."

"Oh, that'll be all right. I'll arrange with Rose. She won't mind," said Susan, not seeing Ryan's look of grave astonishment. Susan answering for Rose in this confident fashion grated on Ryan.

Susan continued her talk on men and manners till they reached the Circus, where he saw her into an omnibus. They parted, to think of one another.

For already Susan's Hydra had developed another head called Ryan. The Lucien head, lately strong and dominant, was weakening; the Dugald Miller was in high favour, though he wanted encouragement. The Lucien was very troublesome. With him there had happened what had before happened with Susan, in spite of her caution. She had arranged to stop at a certain point, and then her feelings had run away with her just a little before she went to Southbourne. They had culminated in the railway carriage and in the pine wood. For perhaps three weeks she had been hotly in love with Lucien. She had let him see it. She had been very sweet to him. Susan really in love was glorious.

Her nature, freed from checks and artifice, declared itself in frank abandonment. At those moments she was capable of sacrifice, of devotion. But they were only moments. They were dogged by caution and calculation, saving qualities in conduct, paralysing in art. Her temperament was towards license, her reason counselled restraint. Because she never yielded completely, she thought she controlled herself. Really few women could resist less. The attraction of conquest, of admiration, was irresistible. Susan was at the mercy of her emotions. A caprice was gratified till it was stale, an infatuation indulged till it became dangerous. So she prided herself on chastity.

Now, to use her own language, she was shedding Lucien. It was difficult. A man led as far as he had been believes his senses. Protests and explosions of anger are misinterpreted and opposed by a patience which would be sublime if it were not so easily made ridiculous. The process of shedding the lover kills the love. A persistent and unreasonable man is easily hated. He becomes a nuisance, even a danger, and dangers have to be removed. Susan had the whip-

hand, and knew it. She was not married. The pedestal of virtue suited her figure.

Susan knew that Rose was now her best card. As things became more and more hopeless, Lucien would shrink from giving her pain. If there had been a time when he would have ventured everything for Susan's sake, when she had fallen back from cowardice, when she had looked at the future and found her love had not courage, that time had passed. Lucien had been sincere at all events with Susan. As regards Rose, there was a terrible account against him. Luck and her own loyal nature had hitherto saved her much. If, argued Susan, Lucien sees it's all up with me, he'll do all he can to prevent Rose knowing.

The strain of such thoughts she eased by entertaining the Hydras, Dugald and Ryan, with fair speech.

Meantime Ryan had summed her up.

"A wrong 'un, that lady," he said. "Of the worst sort, too. Her 'dare not' waits a long way off her would. She's tiring of Luce. She's got him tied up pretty tight. Looks as if Rose need n't worry. Still I'll learn a little more of you, Miss Stanier. By

your kind permission I will call on my friend Mrs. Bewick. Lucien can hoe his own row. I'll appear for Rose."

On the Friday he went to Wilmot Gardens, and explained to Rose the notable scheme he had worked out for reconciling his own views with Sir Thomas Hoyle's.

"Fletcher and I take a theatre. If at the end of three years it's not a success I retire, and Alice and I live the rest of our days with her father. We shall be married after the first Drawing-room. Alice is going to be presented before her marriage. I shall be a full-blown manager in six months! Bow down to me, Rose."

"What an arrangement!" said Rose scornfully. "It's all in your favour. Never mind, you're sure to fail, and you'll have to live a healthy country life ever afterwards."

"Note that I marry Alice and stay in the profession. Got my way there at all events," he replied, laughing. "As for failing. In the bright dictionary—What did you say? *Connu!* Oh, *Fleur de Luce!* Sympathy, Rose, sympathy! Rejoice with those about to be managers."

"I'll rejoice with Alice, then. O Ryan, you are stubborn! You don't deserve to have your way."

Ryan sat there rubbing his big hands, and winking, and blinking, and getting very pink, till Rose fairly burst out laughing at the spectacle of success. Then she came round, and listened to his plans about the theatre, and especially about the house, and the Court-dress for Alice.

"She'll come up soon after Christmas. I told her one of my friends would show her round," he said.

"One of your friends?" said Rose. "Alice has a friend of her own to do that. I shall look after her. I must write to her about the house. Have you any idea —?"

"Sometimes flats attract, at others one does justice to Grosvenor Square."

"Perhaps with your influence you could get Buckingham Palace."

"Miss Stanier — Mr. Miller," announced Sharpe, and Susan treated Ryan to an edifying exhibition of affection. Mr. Dugald Miller, a well-mannered youth, renewed his acquaintance with Rose by giving her some lovely flowers.

"Now I wonder whether the suburban serpent put you up to that, my lad," thought Ryan. He watched Miller, noticed the way he turned to Susan for confirmation and support with a charming air of comradeship.

"Early stage. He likes her very much. Hasn't thought of anything beyond being friends; she's not tuned him yet. Wise virgin! Wants his constitution to settle first," thought Ryan. And all the time Susan was lavishing the treasures of her intellect on him. They had been to the National Gallery, and the talk turned on pictures.

"Technique is nothing, personality is everything," said Susan.

"Where have I heard that?" said Ryan quickly.

"Oh, it's not original," she replied. "I read it somewhere, years ago."

Ryan nodded, while Susan reeled off the stock criticisms on the great masters. He recalled the days in Raynor's studio in Bayswater, when Willie declaimed against the technique doctrine. In a flash he saw the house, a big studio with a portico stuck on it, the little room where Ryan slept, and the

spacious studio itself, and Raynor sitting in the wing chair in the dusk arguing with dim figures who would not be convinced. For these were the days when technique was lord of all. Susan had settled Velasquez's business as Ryan looked up and saw Lucien coming in.

With experts talk of their subjects, before them talk of any other, was Susan's rule ; so when Lucien came she dropped out, and lured young Dugald to talk of science. But he wouldn't bore people with agricultural chemistry, though he made it interesting when Rose talked to him under cover of a hot discussion on the progress of women.

"Really, Mrs. Bewick, you're only listening because you know I'm mad on chemistry. It can't interest you, really," he said. "I was going to say — oh, about America. I want to go there. They're a long way ahead of us. You know their government does a lot for science. When I can afford it I'm going to Professor Alexander Mitchell's place. Oh, it's lovely — finest thing in the world. I could go in for forestry too, couldn't I? Properly, I ought to go now — three years is the course."

"Perhaps you will," said Rose, smiling.

"Don't think so. There're too many of us, Mrs. Bewick. It costs a lot at Professor Mitchell's," said Miller with resignation. "If I did, you might come over for your holiday. I'd show you everything. It's really very interesting. Miss Stanier's going, now. May I call if I'm in London? I go to work to-morrow."

"I hoped you would come before this," said Rose, as they followed Ryan down the passage.

"See you soon, Lucien," said Susan, as she shook hands with him. "By-the-bye, don't come to the stage-door so often. You understand. Take care of yourself. *A rivederci.*"

After this plain warning Susan felt justifiably angry when, a few days later, she met Lucien turning on to the Embankment from the Savoy. But for a slight fog she would have seen him in time to avoid him, and keep her appointment with Shepherd at the stage-door of the Mayfair.

"Susan!" he exclaimed; "I was just —"

"Just going to the stage-door, though I told you not to," she returned sharply. "You never think of me."

"That's the very thing I was doing."

"You need n't, then; I don't want you to. Besides, I don't believe you were. Did n't I tell you not to give me away at the theatre?"

"I was n't going there; I was going to the City," said Lucien. "Anything wrong, Susan? You don't look very well this morning."

"Then don't examine me so closely. Anything wrong, indeed? You ought to know; if you don't, I do. This kind of thing must come to a stop; I'm tired of it."

"Tired of me, you mean," said Lucien, quietly.

"Don't shout. Keep your hair on. Of course I'm tired of you. You're enough to tire any woman. You better go back to your wife. I don't want another woman's leavings."

She laughed defiantly, stagily, enjoying his surprise. There's nothing like giving it 'em straight, she thought.

Lucien had seen her in tempers before this, had laughed at the coarse vigour of her speech, but he had never seen her look so strange, had never heard that tone before.

The subliminal Susan revealed a slum-woman.

He said nothing. At the next turning she stopped.

“This is my way,” she said. “Good-bye, and ——”

“Good-bye,” said Lucien, scarcely stopping.

CHAPTER VIII

"FLEETWOOD LLOYD'S come back," chanted Rose to Ryan a few days later. "Fleetwood Lloyd's been mixing the styles. Now they have had to send for Lucien. Fleetwood Lloyd's going back to his clubs, and his dinner, and his getting of business. M. de Froncemagne demands the artist who designed the plans. Would that I had seen the fiery Count and the diplomatic Lloyd going over those plans!"

"Rose! Rose!! Mrs. Bewick!!!" cried Ryan. "I am shocked! That you should sound the loud timbrel o'er Fleetwood's downfall. The good man struggling with adversity."

"The bad man struggling with hypocrisy," interrupted Rose, flushed and sparkling. "Ryan, don't pretend to be a humbug. You're not actor enough for that. You're just as glad as I am really."

"What price coals of fire?" asked the moralist. "I am delighted for Lucien's sake.

It'll do him good to get away. When does he go?"

"The day after to-morrow. Charing Cross at eight. Come and see him off, Ryan."

"My dear Rose, at eight precisely I drop a piece of buttered toast on my wife's wedding bonnet, and the public roar. Otherwise — well, you know."

Rose saw her husband off alone. As she drove home she felt for the first time in her life glad that he had gone away. If her misgivings had any foundation — she did not admit that they had — this was the best thing that could happen. Then she hated herself for thinking of Lucien in this way. Had n't he been friends with many ladies without her thinking twice about it? Yes, she answered herself at once, but they were not Susan Staniers. Since Mrs. Valance's warning Rose had been on her guard with Susan, on her guard, too, against being unjust to Susan. Perhaps Rose was too ready to see only the good qualities of her friends, too warmhearted to cavil at blemishes, perhaps too little experienced in such matters not to be deceived sometimes. She imagined no evil and saw none. If it was made visible to her, she was apt to

recoil and not to return. She recoiled from Susan now. Casual references from Shepherd and from Ryan showed her that concealment was habitual with Susan. Why not say she had been there with Shepherd, or met Ryan here? Why this habitual reticence? Why, also, this parade of sincerity? Because it was the best pose for an *intrigante*? Rose had insight; she could unravel a skein of character if she liked. The idea of dissecting her friends appeared a profanation to her. Already she had noticed Susan too much. She had discovered insincerity. Lucien gone, she could give up an exercise she felt to be degrading.

She need not have troubled, though she could not know that Ryan had taken up the study of Susan.

Ever since he guessed Rose's fears that day it had stuck in his memory. Rose and Willie Raynor, Susan and Lucien and himself — he kept thinking of that combination. To know Susan more, and to know more of Susan, struck him as the obvious course. He did not care for this kind of sport, he did care for Rose. He was a sportsman, too. Who says "sportsman" says "tracker" — in

modern language, "detective." Going home from his club in the hours when the silent London vastness favours the brooding mood, he thought it over night after night to no purpose. His mind was nosing the ground in every direction, like a hound at fault whimpering over a tangled scent.

He did not know Susan intimately, not well even. They had not been in the same company. He had not met her half-a-dozen times when, in the chance encounter of a *matinée*, she asked him to introduce her to Rose. He remembered that she asked, and that she asked to be introduced to Mrs. Bewick. That was etiquette, of course. It was a little odd that she knew Rose by name.

Though he detested Franco-Italian cooking, Ryan lunched at Giuseppe Joe's for five days in succession. The sixth day Susan came in. Now that Ryan was acting at another theatre, he thought it best not to go to the Mayfair. It would look deliberate; he preferred chance. The chance meeting led to others. Very soon they were old friends. Susan appreciated Ryan. Socially, he was better than Lucien. A county family impressed her. She tried to catch the coun-

try family tone from Ryan. She read novels about county society, which appeared to consist in sport, and meals, and baths. Hunt breakfasts, "shoot" luncheons, and men who could n't be kept out of baths. The eldest son always quarrelled with the squire about cutting off the entail. Ryan said of course they did; a man had to look after his father. In the end, Susan found that not a M. F. H., not a J. P., best expressed the county gentleman. That was reserved for the man with the spud. Round him county society revolved. To put a middle-aged man in a field with a spud was the great achievement of the land laws. Indeed, it was doubtful whether the man were wanted, the spud was so much more important. At least Susan's novelists implied as much, and Ryan supported them.

Susan talked freely, but not so freely as with Lucien. She recognised a difference in Ryan. He was cool and practical; besides, there was time. Meanwhile she talked a bit too much, and let him see through her praise of Rose a background of envy. She talked a little too much, and a little too indifferently, of young Miller.

A letter from Lucien altered everything. It contained a letter directed to Rose, which Lucien asked Ryan to give to her as soon as he found a convenient occasion. He said also that the letter told Rose about his passion for Susan. "I have told her everything without reserve about myself; about Susan I have said as little as I could. It is a statement of facts, a bare record. I have not excused myself. I have not pleaded for forgiveness. All I have tried to do is to let her know what occurred. I cannot return to her until she knows. Rose must decide. Do this for me, Ryan. Rose is very fond of you. You can do it better than any one else. Write soon."

Ryan did n't pity him a bit. He saw that he had suffered, and said he deserved to. He did not doubt his sincerity at all, but he did not feel inclined to sympathise with him. He quite understood that Lucien had come to his senses, that a reaction of remorse had set in. That was Lucien all over. He had outraged his own sensitiveness, and now he loathed himself. The thing was bad enough to be sure, but Lucien's delicate conscience would make it infinitely worse; and if it

ended with him, thought Ryan, it would n't matter if it did. Ryan did n't like the duty thrust upon him. This belated consideration for Rose rather disgusted him. Of course Lucien, in the jargon of the scrupulous, felt the need for confession. No man had less sympathy with that sort of thing than Ryan. Still, when he cooled, he saw that he was n't quite the temperament to measure Lucien. He had a glimmering, too, of John Bull's inadequacy as a spiritual instrument. Something — God knows where from — had been given to Ryan that Legards had for generations lived and died without. It enabled him to see, if not to understand, a humanity of finer fibre. It was no use saying it was all nonsense; it was there.

The natural man Ryan would have taken Susan in his stride. He knew her register! And Lucien must need take her seriously! He was n't revolted by the suburbanity which, after a lunch with Susan, made Ryan feel as if he had been a long time at Whiteleys. What was her attraction then? She knew how to use her sex, that was Susan's secret. It's a weapon few women use, or need to use; fewer use it deliberately.

But in time Ryan had got over his anger with Lucien. He decided to write, saying he would think over the matter and let him know.

There was Rose to think of. He did n't like the idea of giving her Lucien's letter, nor of her knowing more than she knew now. Some things are best not known. You never knew how women would take these things. Besides he, Ryan Locke, had determined that Rose should not suffer.

That night coming home from the club with Fellowes, who was very keen about the theatre project, his mind cleared the tangle in the scent, and took the strangest line. When he got in, Ryan read Willie's book again.

It was a thousand, a million to one against it. Even if it were so, by itself it was only a remarkable coincidence. The combination made it valuable, and that again was another remote chance. He had to see Susan at once. The next day they met at Giuseppe Joe's. In the light of his own idea, Susan became peculiarly interesting. If he were right, she must know a great deal she was not supposed to know. She must have acted on a set scheme. He and Lucien and Rose must have amused her extremely.

He lighted a cigarette, sipped his coffee, and said —

“Have you many of Lucien’s letters?”

Susan flushed brilliantly, uncontrollably, and met Ryan’s look with flaming eyes.

“What’s that to you?” she replied hotly.

“I’ll tell you,” said Ryan, noticing the revelation of a new Susan. That hardened mouth and straightened face and insolent stare revealed the recesses of a temperament. In the blaze of her anger she had exposed herself.

“I’ll tell you,” he repeated quietly.

“I don’t want to know; I sha’n’t listen,” said Susan.

“I want you to give me those letters,” Ryan went on.

“Not for any money.”

“I had n’t thought of offering you money,” he continued. “I’ve had a letter from Lucien. He asks me to give Mrs. Bewick a letter in which his relations with you are acknowledged.”

“Lucien’s a coward.”

“‘Conscience doth make cowards of us all,’” said Ryan. “This is a case of con-

science. Perhaps coward isn't the right word. There's a sort of courage in confession."

"How about me? I'm not thought of."

"Isn't that an ordinary risk in these cases?"

"Well, I don't know about that. Anyhow, if that letter goes, I'll send all his."

"Naturally; but isn't that a bit late?" urged Ryan. "Shouldn't they have been sent first, long ago. A certain kind of letter doesn't keep well. They're always useful, of course, but their value weakens with time. There's only one letter it ever looks well to use like that — that is the first."

"It's shameful of Lucien," exclaimed Susan. "He goes off to France without a word to me; he doesn't write me a line, and this is the first I hear of him. It's revenge — that's what it is."

"I don't think so," said Ryan firmly. "It's remorse, shame, expiation. He thinks he's the vilest of men, that confession is his only course. That idea's got hold of him."

"He takes fire all at once, and all over."

"When a match is applied to a train of powder the same thing occurs."

"He's not so inflammable as that, you know."

"We flash at different temperatures."

"You make excuses for him," said Susan. She was enjoying this interview. It was real. Her lover's friend trying to get compromising letters from her!

"Look here, Susan," said Ryan. "Lucien's made a fool of himself? Granted! Why should n't the matter end there? I'll undertake to get him not to send that letter if you'll give up his letters."

"A clever idea! Mr. Legard, do you think I don't see through it all? It's a dodge to get those letters from me. How do I know Lucien's written that letter? How do I know this is n't an invention of yours to save your friend Mrs. Bewick any trouble in the future? Or a plot between you and Lucien to get his letters back? Where am I, then?"

"What do you want the letters for?"

"Keepsakes. I keep all my nice letters."

Evidently your stock-in-trade, thought Ryan. They talked some time longer. Susan would not believe that Lucien would ever let his letter go to Rose. It was all bluff, she said, and absolutely and finally re-

fused to come to terms. Ryan persevered, saw her again and again, and waited till he feared Lucien would lose patience and write direct to Rose. He returned to the idea that had come to him that night he walked home with Fellowes. He made these extracts from the note-book, assuming that the Venus symbol stood for a woman.

"Went to see him. Handsome, fascinating. She fascinated. Angry that I came. What a change so soon."

"No letters all this time. She still away."

"Weary of solitude. Went to ——'s. Saw Allard's picture. Did they notice me? I could have cried out. Félicité, he calls it. A marvellous likeness of her. They praised the drawing of the other figure. The other figure! Very like. What does it mean? I have suffered."

"Allard has told me. I must go there. Can it be true?"

"It is true."

On this slight material Ryan had founded the theory that Susan Stanier was the woman who had ruined Willie Raynor, that Mr. Allard's picture told something important, that the other figure was Butler Carstairs.

This picture, with its flagrant revelation, must have come upon Raynor with its full shock. The picture, and what he learnt from Allard and from his journey, told something so shameful, that it turned his reason. Raynor was not the man to give way merely because a woman had disappointed him. In this picture lay the key to his strange death. The thought of his friend, weary with longing, coming by chance across this fatal proof of worthless love, filled Ryan with a sense of the blind irony of events. It fixed his purpose, edged his curiosity. He had to avenge the past as well as the present.

Ryan set to work methodically. Within two days he had seen Allard, and learnt from him that he had painted the picture when he was staying near Pont-Neuf, in Normandy, a farming country scarcely touched by tourists. One morning he had seen a woman at Beau Séjour, who realised his idea of the chief figure. He had sketched her attitude on the spot. Beau Séjour was a sort of boarding-house kept by a Mme. Dupont.

"I knew her pretty well. She knew most of the artists, English or French, who came there. When I told her I was in a difficulty

about the heads in my picture, she lent me the photographs from which I painted the figures. They're not likenesses. I'm no good at portraits besides, and one wouldn't copy exactly in such a case. *Félicité* I sold with some other small things to a dealer. I'll give you his address with pleasure."

The rest of their talk had been about the stage. Allard, once assured that he would n't be dragged into a law-court or give pain to Raynor's people, had been as helpful as possible. He gave Ryan the impression of a quiet, contented, thoughtful man. He talked refreshingly about the stage.

Ryan next got Mrs. Pearce to call at his rooms. She listened attentively to what he told her; but as to helping him, that, she said, was impossible.

"You know, Mr. Locke, what I said when the master died. The night before, I made him a promise to say nothing about him and her. 'All right, Mrs. Pearce,' he said. 'What you'll promise, you'll do.' I've kept that promise. I was sorry I made it, very soon; I've been sorry ever since. I'd be glad to help you, Mr. Locke, any other way at any time."

“Well, it’s a pity, Mrs. Pearce; still, I mean to find out the truth.”

“Quite right, sir,” said the woman eagerly. “Don’t you give up; stick to it, Mr. Locke. Don’t go to the police, nor to the agents. Do it all yourself, if you can.”

Mrs. Pearce’s keen black eyes glowed over her dead white face.

“I must get some one,” said Ryan.

“You go to Stanislaus Blake. He’s all right. He’s not a fool; and he won’t take your money without doing the work. Good-day, Mr. Locke. I wish you good luck.”

The next morning Ryan sent in his private card to Stanislaus Blake at his chambers in the Temple. Mr. Blake, a big, quiet man, very dark and rather sallow, impressed Ryan favourably. In frame and limbs he recalled the midland farmer; his manner and face suggested a Latin strain. He sat at a large pedestal writing-desk, kept very neat. On either side of it stood some shelves filled with railway guides, almanacs, and books of reference. He put Ryan’s card into a little drawer which closed with a spring lock.

“Well, Mr. Locke, what can I do for you?” he said, drawing a copying-press to him. “Tell me all about it.”

He looked at Ryan for a moment, took an open letter off the desk, a locked copying-book from a drawer, damped the leaves, arranged the pads, and put the letter in the book, then the book in the press, turned the screw, and waited. Though there was no appearance of quickness, the swift precision of each action finished the process in a few seconds.

"I distract you," said Mr. Blake. "Many people are distracted if you do something while they talk."

"You are very quick, Mr. Blake. I noticed you copying that letter."

"Do mechanical things mechanically, that's the principle. Who told you to come to me, Mr. Locke?"

"Mrs. Pearce."

"A servant? Pale, dark eyes, sharp glance? Yes. Go on."

Ryan stated his aim, and explained his plan.

"Yes; of course, yes. Nothing else to do," said Blake, taking all Ryan's ingenuity as naught. "It's very simple. You want some one to go to Beau Séjour and report. Scarcely worth coming to me, Mr. Locke, for this sort of thing. I'm expensive. You

see my work's confidential — never heard of, never in the papers; nothing of that kind. If a case gets that way, I send it on to the police."

"But this is confidential, you know," urged Ryan. "I'd like you to do it, and I'll pay what you think fair."

"Quite right, Mr. Locke. Never tell a story to more people than you can help. I'll do it, then, on my usual conditions. When I once take up a case, it's mine. I do what I undertake to do in my own way. I don't answer questions, and I take all responsibility. Will that suit you, Mr. Locke?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well. Those names and addresses correct, and spelt correctly?" said Stanislaus Blake, handing his notes to Ryan. "They are? Check me while I go through the story."

He ran through the whole story without omitting one fact or consideration. Ryan prided himself on having been very clear in his statement.

"You see I put the events in their natural order," said Blake. "It makes things clear."

Yes, I understand; to wait reply to my telegram, and then wait your friend. You won't expect to get the picture before, say next Tuesday — that's a week. I must allow for accidents. Mme. Dupont may be dead, the house down, and so on."

"I should be very surprised if you had it by then."

"Surprised and welcome, Mr. Locke," said Blake, taking a blank piece of paper on which he wrote in pencil "The Retreat," Apple-tree Place, N.W., marked it with a circle, directed an envelope, which he dropped into a tube communicating with the outer office. Then he wished Ryan good-day.

"You are sure you can send the photographs in time?" he asked.

"Quite sure," said Ryan.

By five o'clock photographs of Raynor, Susan, and Carstairs were at Stanislaus Blake's office. Between that day and the following Tuesday Ryan had time to convince himself that his famous theory was utterly absurd.

After his late breakfast on the Tuesday he received a telegram.

"Everything as you wish. — STANISLAUS."

Ryan telegraphed at once to Lucien to go at once to Pont-Neuf.

Then he called on Rose, interrupted her household duties, confused her correspondence, made her go out to lunch and study fashions in shop-windows all the rest of the afternoon.

"You're a delightful companion, Ryan," said Rose, as she got out of the hansom at Wilmot Gardens. "I wish your backer paid up the last instalment every week."

"Just like women," thought Ryan, walking across St. James's Park. "They always think they know."

CHAPTER IX

EARLY on the Friday of that week Susan received a reply-paid telegram, asking her to come to Ryan's rooms at four in the afternoon of the next day. She replied "Accept your kind invitation."

Till then she had a headache.

A few minutes after the time appointed Susan rang the bell at the entrance to Ryan's rooms in Nelson Mansions, S.W.

"Come in, Miss Stanier. Delighted to see you," said Ryan opening the front door and conducting her to the dining-room. "You'll find that a comfortable chair. Yes, they're nice rooms. Kitchen opposite to you, bedrooms on the other side of the passage."

"Jolly room this," said Susan, impressed by the fine quality of the furniture, carpet, and curtains. She thought it showed the absence of a woman's hand. She missed the crowd of knick-knacks, all the nameless signs

of a woman's loving care. The spacious simplicity she thought bareness; she could not see that each of the few engravings and ornaments was perfect, and was allowed space to do justice to itself. Who gave him cut flowers? She tried to remember the ladies at his theatre.

Meanwhile Ryan had brought a little tea-tray with a spirit-lamp.

"Let me make it," cried Susan, stripping her hands. "Take my veil."

"Smart jacket," said Ryan. "Navy blue's all the wear. Accept my congratulations. How well you're looking!"

"Show, mere show; walking's given me a colour. One lump?" she asked, holding the sugar-tongs interrogatively, and giving her fluttering hands a rest. "What lovely tea!"

"Glad you like it. Have some bread and butter and French pastry. Do you care for French pastry?"

"Love it!" said Susan, taking a jam sandwich cased in glazed pink sugar. "Ryan, there's going to be a new management at the Mayfair."

"Any idea who it is?"

"Yes, I have. It's Duncan Macleod."

"He's been hungering after management a long while."

"Silly to make such a mystery of it. I saw through it at once. I haven't told any one."

"Don't."

"Not me. I shall write in at once."

"Nothing like being early," said Ryan, with an effort. "More tea? A cigarette, then?"

"Thanks. Hold the match."

The flame lit up the seaweed eyes, brought out the bran-splashes, and for a moment the lustre of her hair flashed in the dusk.

"Ah, that's good!" she panted, watching the jet of grey smoke issue from her lips. "Now for business. What do you mean by that telegram?"

"One moment. Let me ask you a question."

"Fifty, if you like."

"Will you give me Lucien's letters?"

Susan laughed loud and long.

"You persistent creature. No, I won't; not one."

"Better do it friendly. I'd much rather.

Come, Susan, be sensible. Give them up and avoid any fuss or bother."

"The old opening, Ryan. I've been there before."

"I warn you. If this is to be purely business, I shall carry it through resolutely."

"I'm not afraid."

"It's no, then?"

"No, it is."

"Well, that telegram meant that I know all about Butler Carstairs."

"What about Butler?"

"You shall see," said Ryan, rising and touching the bell.

There was a step in the next room, the door opened, a woman with a parcel came in and advanced to the table. Ryan switched the light on.

Susan and Mrs. Pearce were face to face. Their eyes met for a moment. Susan reddened, turned her head away, and stared at the wall.

Mrs. Pearce waited, calm with intense joy, her shining eyes fixed on Susan's whitening face.

"Send that woman away," said Susan painfully.

"On one condition. You consent?"

There was a long silence. They could hear the people in the street talking, the shouts of the newsboys, the cries of the conductors. Susan sat rigid in doubt, a half-burnt cigarette between her fingers.

"No, I won't," she said at last.

"Very well; I must go on," said Ryan.

"I need n't stay! You can't keep me here!" she cried, jumping up. "I shall go. Where's my veil?"

She tied it on recklessly, and took her gloves. She had got to the door when she hesitated, mistrusting her impulse.

"I suppose I'd better hear what you have to say," she said, going back to her seat.

"It won't make much difference to me whether you do or not. I think it'll make a great deal of difference to you."

"Of course you say that," she replied. "We can talk alone, I suppose?"

"No; I want a witness."

"All right; you're master here. You are business-like, Mr. Legard," she replied, closing her eyes and leaning back with a conviction that this was "life." It was Extra special! Verbatim report! Scare

head-lines! The sort of thing eagerly talked of in dressing-rooms with exclamations of sham disgust.

"Open the parcel, please," said Ryan to Mrs. Pearce. "Miss Stanier, I'm going out of town to-morrow night after the play."

"Yes?"

"To stay with a friend of Mr. James Miller, near Runcorn."

"Oh, Dugald's father."

"Yes. Their place, Longcroft, is the next to my friend's. Mr. Miller is to dine with us," he continued, directing Mrs. Pearce with his hand. "I thought of taking that with me."

Susan, who had avoided seeing Mrs. Pearce, looked towards the sideboard, following Ryan's glance. The blood rushed to her heart; the shape of her face changed; her hair looked black against her grey skin.

"That's mine; that's my picture!" she cried sharply. "You've stolen it! It's mine; I know it is!" She was staring at a small picture where a red-haired, handsome woman lay on a *chaise longue* in a balcony amid the trellised sprays of an exotic plant. Her head, up-lifted, turned towards the

right, as if looking at some one there in the shadow.

"You can have it if you like, you know."

"You're a brute, Legard; a cunning beast. Do you think I'll give you the letters for that, for my own property? Let me have it at once!" she cried, springing forward against Ryan. "If you don't, I'll make a row; I swear I will!"

She rushed to the window and flung the curtain aside.

"That won't do any good. You'll only get a crowd and the police in," said Ryan.

"If you claim the ——"

"I do claim it — it's mine."

"Then you'll have to summon me for it."

She looked to one side there was Mrs. Pearce, to the other there was Ryan, between them the picture on the sideboard.

She stood there, silenced by choking passion; she looked around for something dangerous, something to hurl, or to stab with. There was nothing within reach. She dropped sullenly on a chair in the embrasure.

"Play it out, Mr. Legard," she laughed. "What's the rest of your plot? Let's hear it. Come along! Buck up!"

Ryan began walking to and fro with his hands in his pockets.

"It's like this," he said slowly. "That woman is you, the place is Pont-Neuf, the house Beau Séjour, kept by Mme. Thérèse Dupont the ——"

"Well, well — what if it is, there's nothing in that."

"There's something more," said Ryan, bending over the picture. "You see she's turning as if she were speaking to some one; she's looking up a little, too. Well, there's no one there in that shadow. The colour's thicker there, too. The figure's been painted over."

"Some water, Mrs. Pearce," he exclaimed, startled at Susan's face of fear.

Mrs. Pearce poured whiskey freely into a tumbler and filled it up with water. Susan drank it eagerly. Her colour came back.

"To cut the matter short," said Ryan, "that figure can be brought out again. It's Butler Carstairs. I propose to take this picture to Cheshire with me to-night and explain it to Mr. Miller."

"No, Mr. Legard; no, you won't! Ryan, don't. That would be too cruel. You

wouldn't do such a thing. You can't be so hard, so heartless! Say you won't, please, Ryan; promise me you won't!"

"You talk of 'hard' and 'heartless.' You! Well, you ought to know, Miss Stanier," burst out Ryan. "How did you treat Willie Raynor?"

Mrs. Pearce quivered and swayed for a moment at the name.

"You ruined my friend Raynor. You drove him to his death. That was not enough, you must try Lucien next. Was my turn coming? Very likely. Mrs. Bewick's your friend — that didn't matter. Dugald Miller's to be your husband — that didn't matter. I am hard and heartless, am I? Quite the other way. If it hadn't been for Rose, I'd have gone to Mr. Miller at once. You can thank Rose for this warning."

"Pity she wouldn't marry you."

"I knew you were jealous of her," said Ryan; and after a slight pause he continued, "lock that picture up, Mrs. Pearce; here's the key. Well, Miss Stanier, that's all I have to tell you. I needn't keep you. Thank you," he said, as Mrs. Pearce returned the key of the cabinet.

"It's an infernally clever trap! There's no getting away from that," exclaimed Susan. "You can have the letters, Ryan, if you'll give me my picture back."

"You assume! If the letters — all the letters — are at the theatre by a quarter to eight to-night, I'll ask you to accept that painting," replied Ryan.

"I'd rather it did n't go to the theatre," said Susan.

"Will you call for it, then. Mrs. Pearce will be here, or my servant. What time is Read coming back?"

"He did n't say any particular time, sir. I was to wait for him," said Mrs. Pearce.

"Mrs. Pearce can give it you, then."

"I'd rather fetch it on Monday. I sha'n't be able to bring the letters myself, perhaps; but you shall have them, to be given to you personally," said Susan, putting on her gloves.

Ryan handed her her umbrella, and opened the door.

"No reason why we should n't shake hands," said Susan lightly. They shook hands silently, and she went out.

Ryan sat there a long time brooding so

intently that Mrs. Pearce had to ask him twice whether she might go out for a few minutes.

"Oh, yes; of course — certainly. Going back to-night, Mrs. Pearce?"

"No, sir. I'm sleeping at a friend's."

"Mrs. Pearce, you could tell me now. You see I know a good deal."

"I promised to say nothing about her *and* him. I'm sorry not to oblige you, sir."

"Oh, you're right. Thank you for coming to help me. By-the-bye, Mrs. Pearce, you might like to have this," he said, detaching his watch from the chain. "It was Mr. Raynor's."

"You give me his watch, Mr. Ryan!"

For once Mrs. Pearce was taken aback.

"Yes, I thought you'd like it!"

She took the watch from him thankfully.

"Me and you, sir, we loved him," she said, and went away quickly.

Ryan was just starting when she came back. He wished her good-bye hurriedly.

About half-an-hour afterwards Mrs. Pearce was patiently trying to fit a key to the cabinet. In time she succeeded, and took out the picture.

"I've not said anything about her and him, and I'm not going to," she thought. Mrs. Pearce was superstitious in the literal observance of an obligation. A little later some one called. Then it was quiet till Ryan's man returned and set Mrs. Pearce free.

On this same evening Lucien Bewick paced the Breton shore, where the sea limits the lands of Kersanton. He had been here a long while, till the afternoon of St. Martin's summer had sunk to dusk as the faint rose and blue of the sunset waned to grey. He had got to be fond of this soft Breton air, of the country, of the people. The peace of this quiet home, steeped in legend and sad romance, had come to him at a time when he needed peace and seclusion. The ordered life at the château, with mornings of work in M. de Froncemagne's room, the journeys to Breton or Norman villages, to copy a specimen of some old builder's work, and the solitary hours when the Count and his sister had retired, came to passion-fevered Lucien as twilight after meridian sun.

He had come fresh from the disgust of his last interview with Susan, fresh from the

humiliating perception of what her nature was. Before then he had caught glimpses of the streaks of coarseness in Susan, but it had been easy to shut his eyes, and keep his fool's paradise intact.

Now when she was tired of him — “people are coming back now” — she let him see her as she really was. Perhaps it was done on purpose to sicken him. She had laughed at his delicacy often enough.

The first days at Kersanton had been bitter with hopeless, shameful love. The recent past — a past of yesterday — filled his solitude with poignant details. They came back so vividly, that the theatre seemed to be next to the Creizker, and its airy steeple to recall the stunted towers of the Horse Guards.

Physical passion still had its grip on him, a grip stimulated by regretful imagination, but wanting the nourishment of intercourse.

Like some charms in magic, a certain sort of love requires the spell to be renewed or the victim recovers. Moving tricks of manner or tone or look in time lose their effect on the imagination, especially when Memory's half-brother, Criticism, insists on accompanying him. It was not that Lucien's love

lessened, but that other feelings had a chance of asserting themselves. They had been stupefied by the first shock, and held down brutally until now; but they were the oldest and strongest forces of Lucien's nature, and they would surely arise in time. At first the merest shiver of sensation had passed along their fibres. That was enough, though; paralysis and sensation do not go together.

This quiet serious city, the grave priests, the houses of a past age, reminded Lucien of the town where he had first known his wife. Rose was often in his thoughts now, but not for long. He could not think of her continuously. She was a shining figure behind a streaming cloud, caught sight of through the rents.

One evening he had been writing to Rose in the vast sombre library. The house-keeper had brought the silver tray with cognac and English whiskey, had wished him good-night, and left him writing under the branches of the ancient candelabra. The tall candles cast a ball of light on to the desk, beyond there was darkness; outside the faint rhythm of rain, inside silence. He read over his letter. Just the kind of letter he

had written for years. He had learnt to imitate himself. Then, as in a flash, the falseness of it all leapt out before him. The letter was a deception, part of a greater deception of his life for all these months. He threw it down, and started walking up and down in the darkness. The course of his secret love rose up an uncontrollable flood. Its beginning, its progress, its culmination, each with its salient events, swept past him.

The petty scheming, the paltry successes, the careful silences and the politic avowals, all these devices to deceive one who never suspected, came back in due order. Nothing was spared him. His mind disgorged an accumulation of remorse. Down this stream, beside the facts, raced a crowd of hopes, desires, and wild imaginings — Lucien Bewick's mental food all this time. He had the strange idea that this was being done for some one to pass judgment on, some one who stood watching the swift procession.

He did not understand this outburst; he had not willed it, and he could not check it.

If for a moment he thought of something else, he could do so only to find the stream had waited for him. It ran on, showing

something so mean and weak, that Lucien asked himself in horror, "Was I like that?"

It reached its end, he thought, when he recognised himself smiling back to Rose as the train left Victoria and he could think of Susan. But it had not ended. The rivers of Hades are circular. It began again, the same current, the same freight, the same course. So it circled many times, silent, unreproachful, saying nothing, showing everything.

The thick candles were half-burnt. It must be late, thought Lucien. He unbarred the shutters, opened the window; the rain was over, and the cool night air rushed in. Looking into the darkness he thought, or tried to think, for still the river whirled. At last he had resolved. Then he went back to the desk, tore up his letter, and wrote another. It was the letter he had sent to Ryan — a letter terrible to write, as Lucien wrote it in bare, formal style. A model of clear statement, free from apologies, self-accusations, or pleadings; nothing but a relation of what he had done. Everything Rose had a right to know was there. Susan appeared as much as was necessary.

As to the future, he suggested nothing.

He felt that Rose's decision, whatever it might be, would govern that.

Soon after dawn he finished the letter. Feeling quite wakeful, he went to bed and slept profoundly.

Ryan's answer disappointed him. He disapproved of the letter entirely. "What precise form of a fool you've made of yourself with Susan does n't matter," wrote Ryan. "But what does matter is telling Rose; that means giving her pain needlessly. No doubt voluntary confession is a very fine and noble action, quite *de rigueur* according to some people. I don't agree with them. You remember the sort of boy who used to confess in the hope of getting off lighter. He did n't, and we rejoiced. Don't think, Luce, that I accuse you of posing. I am thinking in ink. Is confession made to the injured person? To a confessor, is n't it? Trust those people, they know. Remember, Luce, people who confess run the risk of being believed. Have you quite thought out the effect of your *procès-verbal*, your Rhadamanthine statement? How do you think Rose will like it?"

Ryan developed the "riding-straight to hounds," morality at some length. It's a

fair working code, but it doesn't appeal to non-hunting men. Besides Ryan's effort to make morality and Rose's peace of mind coincide was too evident. Lucien's decision had been sincere, and he still wished Rose to have the letter. Ryan's appeal influenced him so far that he consented to a short delay. Ryan's telegram urging him to telegraph to a Mr. Stanislaus Blake saying what time he would reach Pont-Neuf came a few days later.

He had been there. He had seen Mr. Stanislaus Blake. He had been shown photographs of a woman and of a man, an actor named Butler Carstairs, and of another man, of his friend Willie Raynor. The woman was Susan Stanier. She must have looked just the same two years ago as she did now. There was no need to compare these photographs with the others Mr. Blake had with him. Not much need for Lucien to follow Mr. Blake's minute examination of dates of arrival and departure. Whatever the particulars might be, there was no doubt that Willie Raynor had come here for some information — whether confirmation or contradiction was not clear — some weeks after Susan

left, that he had learnt something, that he had gone back and died.

This woman who had ruined Willie was the woman for whom he, Lucien, had sunk to unknown depths. From Willie she had learnt about his friends. They must have talked about him and Rose and Ryan. Susan came to him knowing all Willie could tell her. She had used her knowledge. While he and Rose and Ryan were in the dark, Susan knew. She could guard against any suspicion, though suspicion was very unlikely. No one knew her. He had quarrelled with Willie, and Ryan was away all that season. Only one source of detection — Willie's servant. That was why, thought Lucien — that was the reason Susan got out of that omnibus so hurriedly before taking her seat. She must have seen Mrs. Pearce. Certainly Mrs. Pearce saw her, and stared at her without noticing Lucien. At the time he had put Susan's conduct down to mere whim. He understood it now. Even if Mrs. Pearce would say nothing, Susan would avoid her.

The more he thought, the more revolting the whole thing appeared. She must have deliberately planned to make him love her.

That a woman — a respectable woman — should do such a thing was repulsive. She had rehearsed her effects with his dead friend. What had succeeded with Willie she had used with Lucien. Under the search-light of his new knowledge Susan had not a rag left. Even the poor bit of impulse and sincerity she really had was put down as artifice.

Lucien had one strong wish about Susan — never to see her again, never to speak to her, not to let her hand ever rest again in his. She had done him the worst of services. She had let him see how bad he could be. The moral disgust became translated into physical loathing. Now he wanted to shake off the degradation, the vulgarity she had brought into his life. Lucien had always been lenient to women who had the excuse of sincerity in passion. With himself, now, he made the same allowance. He had been disloyal, untrue, and a hundred other things that were bad. But he had been in earnest, he had been sincere. It was a poor excuse at best, still it stood him in good stead now. It put him above Susan.

Watching the darkness fall on the grey sea till only the white wave-crests were visi-

ble, he reviewed the episodes of his love in the new light he had got. They gained new meanings — not always correct ones. The talk they had one wet evening, as they lingered in Baker Street for the omnibus, came back to him. “Luce,” Susan had said in her abrupt fashion, “why does a woman become a man’s mistress?”

He had tried to put her off with some common-place, but she returned to the strange subject. She would discuss any subject with him, and she was fond of these forbidden subjects. They talked as they strolled along the wet flickering pavement. Susan could not realise that love could make a woman sacrifice herself. She saw no moral reason against such a thing. It did not shock her. But why do it?

“I should never be any man’s mistress,” she had said at last.

Yet she had gone to Beau Séjour with Carstairs.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Ryan drove up to his rooms in Sloane Street on the Monday afternoon following his interview with Susan, the first person he saw was that lady herself. It was a meeting he had tried to avoid by returning as late as possible. Nor did it please Susan either, as her face showed while she watched Ryan paying the cabman.

"How d' ye do, Mr. Legard," she said lightly, as he came up to her. "I've been so driven all day I couldn't come before. See, I've got my picture [she held up the parcel]. Miss Stanforth's ill, and may not play to-night. I've had half a rehearsal, and been rushing about getting things. They're in that cab. After all I suppose she'll struggle through gallantly, and I shall have my trouble for nothing, as usual. Who would n't be an understudy?"

"A nuisance, of course," said Ryan; "but you know the play by this time?"

“Not her scenes,” exclaimed Susan. “I’d been studying the other part — Miss Lamont’s; it’s the part, the woman’s part of the piece, so I’ve gone for it hard. Then the other lady gets ill. So I shall either have to play the part without a rehearsal, or watch her every night from the front till she’s well again. Now I must rush home for a bit of dinner, and then back to the theatre again. So good-bye. Come and see me at the Thursday matinée. I’m pretty certain to play then.”

“Let me give you this when you’ve got in,” said Ryan, taking up the picture, still wrapped in brown paper.

Susan got in the hansom, arranged a lot of soft paper packets very carefully, and then took the picture from Ryan.

“Thanks, very much. Hope you had a good time in Cheshire, Mr. Legard. Tell him where to go, will you?”

“St. John’s Wood, I suppose?”

“Yes, of course. You know.”

“I don’t. It was intuition.”

“Seemed likely, did it? You thought me——”

“To the manner born.”

"Circus Road," cried Susan, through the hole in the roof, and as the cab turned she gave Ryan a view of a profile in anger.

"That was cheek asking about Cheshire," thought Ryan, going in. "And I don't see why she should flare up because I thought she belonged to the St. John's Wood painting lot. Nasty temper, that girl!"

It would have tried any one, however, to get down to the theatre on the Thursday expecting to play at the matinée, and to find your principal had come and was dressing. This after seeing the wretched piece three nights running, getting some scrappy rehearsals, and rushing about London matching things!

Susan hung about the wings until the first act was nearly over. Then she went to the front to condole with the friends she had sent seats to.

"I'm awfully disappointed, Miss Stanier," said Shepherd, whom she met in the lobby. "Quite counted on seeing you. You'd have taken that widow's part capitally."

"It was the other I expected to play," replied Susan. "Will you wait a few minutes? I want to see some people in the stalls. You're not going to sit it out?"

"Certainly not. Once is enough."

Shepherd waited, smoking, till Susan returned.

"Shall we get some tea?" she suggested.
"I'm right down."

As they went towards Giuseppe Joe's she told her story in detail.

"Then at the end you're told you're a tonic," she concluded. "Kind of Miss Stanforth, was n't it?"

They sat there a long while drinking tea and smoking cigarettes. Susan was too angry to care about appearances, and, besides, there was no one else in the café. She was fretful and scornful, silent or voluble. One moment she would go home, the next she would dine in town, as she had arranged to do. Shepherd found her embarrassing, still he was conscious of being Bohemian. It was possible to be Bohemian and dull at the same time. Still there was no getting away from the facts. He was smoking cigarettes in a café with an actress. As a barrister he had to know the world; it gave one a great pull with juries.

Suddenly Susan declared she had a headache; she was going home to lie down; and

if she did n't wake in time for the theatre that was their lookout.

"Rum thing life, is n't it?" reflected Susan, as they walked towards Parliament Street. "Nothing but worry and disappointment, particularly in the profession."

"Oh, well you do have excitement," urged Shepherd. "Look at the law. You sit in chambers all day, no client comes, you read law or you write it. Next day the same; all days the same. Go to chambers, go to lunch, go back, and never a brief. There's nothing for it but philosophy."

"What's your philosophy, Mr. Shepherd? Are you a Stoic like Mr. Bewick? — a belated Stoic, he calls himself."

"Bewick's not a Stoic. He's the same as I am — a Cyrenaic."

"A what? Spell it."

"S-i-r-e-n-a-i-c," said Shepherd, dividing the letters, and confusing the subject.

"I never heard of it," said Susan.

"That is not necessary," said Shepherd. "M. Jourdan had never heard of prose."

"No, he hadn't," said Susan, doubtful whether Jourdan was a person one ought to know about. "Fancy you and Lucien having the same philosophy."

"It's a very comprehensive school."

"Would it serve my purpose?" she asked.

"I should think it would."

"There's the 'bus. Some day you'll tell me more about the Cyrenaic — is that right?"

"Sounds right."

"Cyrenaic philosophy, won't you, Mr. Shepherd?"

"Shall be delighted," he said, handing her into the omnibus.

At "The Retreat" she found a pencil note for her.

"Who is this from?" she wondered, looking at the outside after the manner of women who regard every envelope as a riddle or a challenge. Puzzled, she opened and read: —

"DEAR SUSAN, — I am going to America by the 5 p. m. from Euston. I thought you would come with me to some shops and see me off. My father's in London, too. I wanted to tell you all about it, but I can't wait. I shall call at Mrs. Bewick's if I have time. Perhaps you'll be there. Remember,

it's the 5 p. m. from Euston. — Yours always sincerely,

“DUGALD MILLER.”

She didn't understand it! Dugald going to America! All of a sudden like this! Why hadn't he told her? She would have contrived to see him. Now she couldn't. The train had gone; it was nearly half-past five. Why hadn't she come straight home instead of fooling the time away in the café? Then she cried. She hated to cry; she never cried freely. Her tears were reluctant; just a few that would come, that came again and again, though she dabbed them up at once.

Dugald did not know how much he meant to her. She had thought it wasn't time to let him know yet. But he was in her plans for the future. She had thought it all out, and she was fond of him, too — fond enough. He had gone to America, for years, most likely. Anyhow, she wouldn't see him. “I shall call at Mrs. Bewick's,” he said. “Why at Mrs. Bewick's? Why should her friends run after Mrs. Bewick? Rose was no particular friend of Dugald. Susan had intro-

duced them. Why couldn't he wait, or come back again? Rose made every one fond of her; Ryan Legard would do anything for her; Shepherd thought Rose the best woman in the world; and now Dugald must go to her in his last hours in England. Very likely she had been choosing socks for him at the stores this afternoon.

Susan had a hurried dinner, and set off for Wilmot Gardens.

"Mistress will be down immediately, Miss Stanier," said the discreet Sharpe entirely on her own responsibility. "Shall I take your umbrella, miss? Would you like a cup of tea, Miss Stanier?"

These and other kind inquiries Sharpe made with just enough pause between them to give any one who had anything to say an opportunity of saying it. To-day Miss Stanier had nothing to say. Sharpe retired unabashed.

Susan waited in the well-known drawing-room, noticed a slight alteration in the furniture and the new palm by the window. Some music was open on the piano, the flowers smelt freshly, the débris of afternoon tea remained.

It was clean, homelike, easy, ordered. It recalled the haphazard style of "The Retreat," the bareness, the disorder, the go-as-you-please life of shifts and devices. Why wasn't her home like this? Would she ever have a nice home like other women?

There was a rustle in the passage. Rose came in all rose — rose-pink dress, roses in her hair, rose-lined opera-cloak, and roses in her face. She looked admirable in the low evening dress — bright, buoyant, radiant.

"Forgive my keeping you waiting," she said. "I'm dining with the Valances to-night at the Grand. We're going to see Ryan act afterwards. I thought you'd come this evening."

"Rose, I've been so busy. I've been coming to see you so often. Every time I've been prevented. One thing or another, you know."

"I know, dear."

"What news of Lucien?"

"The best. He's coming back," replied Rose. "We won't talk about him, will we? I want to tell you about Dugald — I'm to call him Dugald now. He's a nice boy, Susan, and very fond of you, I'm glad to say."

He's been talking of you and agriculture all the time. What are phosphates? I led him to believe that I knew."

"He shouldn't talk shop to you," said Susan.

"He explained that he only did that with the elect—the right sort, you know, as he puts it." Rose went on, "Take off your jacket, Susan; the room's close. Well, it was like this. I had just got the lights, and I was trying that new piece of Grieg's, when in comes your Mr. Miller. 'I've got a cab at the door,' he said, 'and I'm going to America. Come and see me off, Mrs. Bewick.'"

"That's just like Dugald," said Susan, smiling.

"Of course I wasn't going to be hustled like that," continued Rose, "so I made him sit down and explain."

"Yes, dear."

"Well, it's been a hurry, and a flurry, and a surprise altogether. You know he's been wanting to go to one of the professors in the agricultural department near Washington. Suddenly his father telegraphs to him to come home. When he gets there he finds

his father has arranged, by cable, for him to go by the *Doric* this evening. Dugald was delighted."

"He would be."

"Mr. Miller made one condition. Dugald was to tell no one outside his family till he got to London. 'It looked a little like being sent away, didn't it?' he asked me. I told him that was absurd; there was no reason, he must know that. And then, Susan, he blushed, and got quite embarrassed. 'Well, there's nothing I know of. Father may have a reason. Father's a good sort — another of the elect, you see — but he has his own way of doing things.'"

"How long will he be away?"

"Three years, perhaps more. He formally bade me good-bye until 1897. He had come up to London for some letters of introduction, and for some business at the Embassy, and to bid good-bye to his friends. He's given me some messages for you."

Rose gave her those messages, simple, colloquial sentences, so that they seemed to be charged with feeling, with sympathy, and with promise for the future.

"Dear, how sad you could n't be there!

He felt it," she said, taking Susan's hand — an unresponsive hand. "I sent Sharpe to the theatre in a cab, telling you to drive straight to the station. He'll write to you to-night, Susan."

"You told him to?"

"I thought you would like it. Three years is n't so long as it sounds," said Rose. "I waited four for Lucien. Must you go to the theatre, Susan? If you'd rather stay with me, I'll send a note to Mrs. Valance. I can explain to her afterwards. You'll be happier here, perhaps."

"Thanks. I must go to the theatre," said Susan. "Did any one else see him off? Only you?"

"Come to-morrow, dear, and I'll tell you all I have forgotten," said Rose as she left. "Stay here till it's time for you to go."

She kissed her, and thought she understood why Susan did not return her kiss.

Susan sat there alone till she had to leave. She thought more of Rose than of Dugald; she couldn't make Rose out. When Sharpe had helped her to put on her jacket she idly tried the new piece on the piano. It was too hard. Her fingers slid into the notes of her

song in Lucien's opera. It was accidental; curious, too, if you thought of it; perfectly natural, where she had the thing by heart. Thinking how oddly things fell out she walked to the theatre, where she heard gladly that Miss Stanforth was playing. She went home early.

"A letter for you, Susan," said her sister.

"It rains letters to-day," she said, going off to her room.

She opened the letter. It was very short.

"I hope you got the picture all right. —
MARY PEARCE."

Susan knew Mary Pearce. A line like this from her meant a great deal. She took the picture from its hiding-place and opened the parcel carefully.

Then it was clear what Mrs. Pearce meant. The figure in the shadow had reappeared, and a good likeness of Butler Carstairs looked down to the appealing woman on the *chaise longue*.

A long while Susan studied the picture, trying to piece things together. She had always feared this woman, and had never quite understood her silence. She knew nothing of Mrs. Pearce's promise to Raynor,

nor, had she known of it, would she have foreseen what a curiously literal construction Mrs. Pearce would put upon it.

Women of that class if truthful are truthful like children, verbally truthful. A promise is binding exactly as far as it goes. No farther. It's like the old compacts with Satan. You must observe it in every word; but if you can get outside it, you are free to break it without breaking it. Mrs. Pearce had promised never to say anything about "her and him." That was a promise about two people jointly. She was free to say what she liked about them separately, or with other people. That afternoon at Ryan's had shown Mrs. Pearce the way to a long-desired vengeance. Susan could not see the method, but the result was plain.

Mrs. Pearce had heard the story, knew how to use this weapon, and had used it. She had got some one to clear the figure of Carstairs, perhaps to touch it up. She had seen Dugald's father on the Sunday morning, and had managed to replace the picture on the Monday morning. Clear enough so far. But was it likely that a man of business like the elder Miller would act on the unsupported

statement of a stranger. It was not likely. Mrs. Pearce knew that. She had referred him to Ryan, who was at that very moment staying at the nearest house. She had most likely told him that Ryan would not answer any questions and why he would n't. Probably Mr. Miller had said nothing to Ryan. He had preferred to act in his own way. His care was for his son ; he had no concern with any one else, no interest in raking up an old story about strangers. He must be a cool, decisive man, Mr. Miller. He had acted quietly, swiftly, effectually. Dugald was on the way to America now.

With him went Susan's hopes of reaching the haven of evident respectability. Her nature ever swung in unstable equilibrium, now to the Bohemia of stage-doors and restaurants, now to the Philistia of suburban trains and two maid-servants. A grain of talent, and she would have chosen the first ; some self-control, and the other would have come to her.

As it was, Dugald had gone, Lucien despised her, Ryan knew her, and Rose was kind to her.

She put the picture away, undressed

mechanically, and lay in bed thinking, always thinking now of the days with Willie Raynor, when she cared for him and liked to hear him talk of his friends, Lucien Bewick and Ryan Locke, and of Lucien's peerless wife Rose. Willie first made her jealous of Rose. He thought there was no one like her. It was exasperating to hear him talk of her. Those three — Lucien, Willie, and Ryan — seemed to be eternally singing a chorus of praise to Rose. That was the beginning of her idea of getting to know the other two men, just to see what would happen. You couldn't call it really a plan, for the slightest thing would have made her give it up. Then Willie died of an overdose of some dangerous medicine. Mrs. Pearce told her that the last time she went to the studio, the last time she had seen Mrs. Pearce till the other day. How oddly things come round! Really, it was Willie Raynor who had sent Dugald away. The connection was obvious. You could trace it — but tracing of this kind either awakens or sends to sleep. Susan slipped over the boundaries of consciousness, just into that hidden land of sleep which is only not wakefulness, because everything is so vivid, so distinct there, because

there the dead seem to live, and those who are far away come back and are with us.

She was dreaming of the last season at the St. George's, when Butler Carstairs came — Butler Carstairs, whose portrait she had seen in the shop windows years ago, before she went on the stage. He was the handsomest man in London. Much talked of, too. He had come back to her. They were at the theatre. He was pretending that he would go over to France with her, when she went to her friends near Amiens at the end of the season. He was at the station. Then he was on the boat talking to her under the dark sky and white stars, while the sea-spray dashed over the bows and fell on them, and they laughed. His voice went over her as the ship went over the falling, rising sea. The motion was fascinating, mesmerising. Long and long they stood there together, while the ample moon struck the wave-crests, and the stars shed a warm radiance. Then there were strange spectral lights ahead, growing more and more distinct, till they resolved into harbour lights. There were shrieks and whistles breaking the glorious dream, breaking it, but not for long; for now she was in the train,

rushing through a darkness of shadowy trees and gloomy houses, and large soft masses that were churches. It was lovely whirling on like this, with Butler's voice still in her ear. He was asking her to do something; he was very persistent. Why did he want her to get out at that station? It was n't hers. She had got out, and she was fast asleep in her room at the hotel near some French railway station. Blazing sun and a French maid were awakening her. It is a day of close heat, making one languorous and limp. Butler is there, kind and sweet, very distinguished in his well-made quiet clothes. Her dream gets tangled here. She has the sense of something to do, something she ought to do, something she cannot do because it will take her from him. Oh, yes, that's it. She has to go to Amiens, and telegraph home that she has arrived. They must know at home; but the friends at Amiens do not expect her till to-morrow. Butler understands at once. She writes a telegram and a letter, which he sends on by train to be despatched from the right place. She can see the man who is to take it, an old thin man with bright eyes. Butler makes him repeat his instructions.

Her next sensation is of driving through a pretty country in the odorous dusk of a summer's evening. A brilliant sunset has passed, leaving an afterglow that lights the upper heavens. On they go; the carriage glides, they talk but little, the silence is better. She wants always to go on driving, smoothly rolling to a golden, mysterious, ever-receding future. She glows with suffused strange pleasure. All things have gone; there are only she and Butler, a few timid stars, and a kindly moon. All her life seems to have been made for these sweet moments; now she lives, and life is glorious. Dim sculptural figures with burdens pass them; the ruddy eyes of an engine shoot across the distance, and the rattle of the train vibrates the still air. From a misty heath they plunge between high hedges into deep lanes, and jolt luxuriously in the rutted path.

Next she is in sudden light. A woman is speaking English with a French accent in a high-pitched voice. She remembers a balcony with grape-like bunches of creamy flowers, a clean-smelling house, and a large homely room with open windows level with the floor. She and Butler are having dinner.

She feels strangely dull and unhappy, and drinks champagne that makes her duller. Suddenly she revives. She and Butler are alone in the darkened room. He is making cigarettes for her, she is sipping a whiskey and soda. Outside the boughs rise and fall, a patch of moonlight shifts on the grass, and there is water running through the hatches of a stream.

Another sound, too — the sound of a compelling voice lulling her, surrounding her, weaving a network of sound about her. Tender, pleading dark eyes are looking into hers, stirring her with wild thoughts. Arms are about her; she is kissed, oh, many times, and kisses in return. She has been leaning on his breast a long while; he is leading her away. Then — she sees it all again, feels as she felt — she hesitates, stops, and clutches at something. There is a crash, a dull noise, and she has fallen!

Susan was broad awake now. She turned the gas up, and her white, aspinalled strip of a room jumps out of darkness.

She threw open the window and welcomed the night wind, cold as it is. Wrapped in an old ulster, she sat thinking over that vivid

dream — how it all came back just as it happened! She had pulled a cabinet down and fallen, spraining her ankle badly. Mme. Dupont, to whom Beau Séjour belonged, had been very kind. Butler had been very good; he had done exactly as she told him. He was n't much good at devising, but he was devoted. Between them no one ever knew that she was at Beau Séjour all that time. What a trouble it was keeping those in England and those at Amiens properly informed — the fear of them writing to one another! Any accident might cause it. Luck was on her side, however. It was all right in the end.

Poor, dear Butler — how good he was! She could see him on that last afternoon looking down at her just as he was in the picture. She had never seen him since. He had told her about his wife. He was going to Australia to get away from her. Poor Butler! The best people were always the most unhappy.

After all, it had come out. In spite of everything, her one burst of real love virtually ruined her. Dugald would have married her; she was sure of that. She would have

been as well off as most women, respected, respectable. Whose fault was it, then? Hers? No. Susan never blamed herself; she blamed others or circumstances, never herself. Now she blamed Rose; she utterly hated her. It was Rose that Raynor maundered of, Rose that Lucien worshipped, Rose that Ryan fought for. And she was the last to see Dugald.

Would Ryan tell that story of Beau Séjour to Lucien? She ought to have made him promise not to. She hadn't thought of it at the time. On the Monday it was too late; he could have written. Lucien might know by now. It was curious he hadn't written. Surely he knew her well enough not to take that Embankment scene too seriously. If he knew, would he tell Rose? Did Rose suspect anything? At times it looked as if she did.

So through the long hours she thought of Rose, always of Rose, till her anger and hatred grew to passionate desire for revenge — it was in her power — a delicious revenge, in spite of Ryan Legard.

A London dawn was breaking when at last she lay down and slept without dreaming.

The next day Susan Stanier was ill, and the one following, and for many other days.

She had to go to deserted St. Joseph's. It was dull, but bracing. She came back well, and soon picked up again. When she felt quite strong she returned to her idea of revenge. The sense of being beaten was unbearable; moreover, she was angry because no one had troubled about her — no one cared whether she was alive or dead. As no one knew she had been ill, they were not likely to inquire about Susan. Her friends were used to her irresponsible ways, and literally took her as she came.

It was on a Saturday morning of a mild November that Susan set to work. She took from her desk two letters, read them, replaced them in the envelopes, and went out, having so timed herself that she reached the Bewicks' flat about one o'clock.

The bell rang with needless noise, as it appeared to her. No one came. She pressed the button for a longer time, and the sharp vibration echoed and re-echoed. Silence for a long while, and then the sound of a dragging step. A sallow, grey-haired man in a painter's blouse opened the door, and stood rubbing his forehead with the end of his brush.

"Is Mrs. Bewick at home?" asked Susan.

"No one's at home," said the painter.
"This flat's to let — from the half-quarter."

"I want to see Mrs. Bewick, who used to live here."

"You'd better see the housekeeper. She knows all about them," replied the man.
"I'm here for the company, cleaning up, and I'm late as it is."

Susan hesitated. She wanted to go in to see the place again.

"I should like to come in for a minute," she said.

The man stared and waited. Susan took out her purse, and went in.

The rooms were bare, with clean patches on the walls where the furniture had stood. The windows were splashed with whitewash; little heaps of rubbish stood in each room. On one lay a broken frame with a cracked and dirty glass. It had held a likeness of Susan. She recognised it at once. She walked from room to room, followed by the limping painter. In the drawing-room she remembered introducing Dugald Miller to Ryan Legard. Lucien's music-room looked quite large. It was full of memories, and

the dining-room — that had memories, too. Susan was fond of reminiscences. She sent the man away to get Mrs. Bewick's address, and waited, recalling a recent past.

"Manor Lodge, Fairfield," said Susan, reading the scrap of paper. "Where's that?"

"On the Brighton line, I think, miss. They'd tell you at Victoria."

After a little waiting she got a train to Fairfield. There the sun was shining faintly, and the country was looking as if it was September. Susan found her way to Manor Lodge. The door was open; some men were taking plants in from a van. Susan went in, trusting to meet a servant. There was no one about. She looked in a room on the right-hand, evidently the dining-room. No one was there. The room opposite was empty, too. She went along the passage, and turned into another room. It looked on the garden.

Near the glass-house there was a group of people, some men with plants, Rose with gauntlets and a trowel, Ryan talking to a tall, pale lady with black hair, and Lucien, as unconsciously provoking as ever, reading the label on one of the shrubs.

Susan watched them for some time. At last she went towards the bell, but turned sharply away. She left the house and went back to the station, tearing up two letters as she walked along.

THE END.

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